

THE
Faith *and* Practice
OF A
CHRISTIAN
EXPLAIN'D and ENFORC'D,
IN SEVERAL
POINTS of IMPORTANCE,
From the more
Select Examples, and Instructive
Topics in HOLY WRIT:
In SIXTEEN
DISCOURSES.

1 Pet. i. 9.

Κοιμίζομενοι πρὸ τέλους τῆ πίστεως ὑμῶν, Σωθῆσθαι ψυχῶν.

By THOMAS DAVIES, M. A.
Rector of *Little Hallingbury in Essex.*

LONDON:
Printed by W. BOWYER. MDCCXX.

Printed and Published by

W. BOWEN

CHRISTIAN

TO

Explain and Enlarge

Sir John Lubbock's

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE

in the Christian Religion

and Instructions
to the People



It is a common notion of
the kind of a Christian
Religion

the Design were not
did not mean to present a
in the first of the
by THOMAS BOWEN
the Author of the
will hardly give a good

LONDON

Printed by W. BOWEN



T O
Sir Chr. Hatton, Bart.
O F
Staunton in Cambridgeshire.

Honoured Sir,

THE common Design of
this kind of Addresses, is
Profit or Protection, and
the Design were not much amiss,
did it not seem to confess a Flaw
in the *Book* or the *Author*; which,
tho' it may carry no *ill Meaning*,
will hardly pass for a good *Com-*
plement.

DEDICATION.

plement. One would think, indeed, that Religion, of all things, should need no *Passport*, nor those that defend it, any nobler *Advantage*: but there is no striving against the Stream of *Custom*; and those that *Write*, even for the sake of others, are apt to *Dedicate* in favour to themselves. The *Aim* may be different, but the *Humour* is general; for some find a strange Pleasure in telling the World, they have a *Patron* and others in telling that *Patron* how great he is in *Figure* and *Station*, and how much greater still by *Worth* and *Merit*. Now were this the constant, as 'tis the usual *Dress* of these modern *Epistles*, might they not fairly pass for mere *Letters of Request* under a *Mask* of *Flattery*?

DEDICATION.

Flattery? But as these, Sir, are very low and mercenary Views, so you will easily discern I was govern'd by very different ones in fixing your Name in the Front of these Discourses.

The *Subject* itself is such, as, I dare aver, will command your Regard, since any good Attempt towards the Support or Advancement of *Truth* and *Piety* cannot fail of being welcome to a Person, who has liv'd so long under the most awful Sense and Practice of *Both*. But whether this mean Present here made you may hope for your Acceptance upon that Title, or not, 'tis already become yours, Sir, upon the firmer Claims of *Relation* and *Blood*, and then I need not add, upon all the Ties of *Duty* and *Gra-*

DEDICATION.

titude: Only I have this to blush at, that I have been so long in paying so just and large an *Arrear*, and, I fear, so *defective* in the very Payment. But if, Sir, you are so good to excuse the Error of so long an Omission, and so slight a Performance, I shall presume upon an easier Pardon for thus *stealing* upon you without the *Preliminaries* of a formal Notice: For as I had little more to offer at last, than *Wishes of Happiness*, and *Acknowledgments of Favour*, I persuaded my self they would look the more sincere and disinterested, the less *Pomp* and *Parade* they came attended with; besides that, I was loth, Sir, to encroach beyond Necessity upon those Hours of Leisure you know so well how to employ. Although

DEDICATION.

Although therefore I may happen to *surprize*, I would hope not to *offend* you by so open a Freedom, especially since 'tis intended as the most authentic Proof I am capable of giving, with what Esteem and Respect I am,

Honoured Sir,

Your Obedient Nephew,

And most Humble Servant,

Tho. Davies.

DEDICATION.

Although therefore I may happen
to be given, I would have not to
allow you to open a Freedom,
possibly have insisted as the
of giving, with what license and

PREFACE

Howard St.



Thos. Davies

10 FEB 60

Thos. Davies



PREFACE.



*Whatever is the Cause of that Vice and Corruption which so grossly abounds both in Principle and Practice, it cannot be justly resolv'd into the want of good Books or Sound Guides: And 'tis therefore the greater Pity and Surprise, that in an Age so polish'd by Arts and Learning, and in a Country where Religion has been so long rescued from the Frauds of Tradition, and
the*

P R E F A C E.

the Fetters of a blind and bigotted Belief, there should be so little of the Power of Godliness; so slender an Harvest where the Seed is so rich, the Soil so improvable, and the Labourers so many. Were we to examine the Tenets of some and the Lives of more, we should be almost tempted to believe that the Preaching of the Cross is as great a stumbling Block to many (who would yet take it ill not to be call'd Christians) as it prov'd so long since to the Jews and Greeks; and yet every Part of this holy Institution has been supported by all the Evidence proper to convince Gainfayers, and inforc'd likewise by every Art of Persuasion which might tend to please Men to their Edification: So that it may be affirm'd with much Truth, that
there

P R E F A C E.

there have been wanting no fit Helps to render Men wiser and better, and even thoroughly furnish'd to every good Word and Work, were but their Hearts well dispos'd to receive the Truth, and to obey it in Sincerity.

For as 'tis both the Character and Interest of a true Zeal to endeavour all it can to reform the Times or the Manners it finds amiss, so have those Persons to whom God and the Laws have in a more peculiar manner allotted this Ministry, been instant in Season and out of Season, to recover, if possible, that Spirit of Holiness which seems almost to be sunk into a Lethargy. And the Methods that have been taken to this purpose, were certainly chosen and directed well, as to their publick Use,

PREFACE.

Use, had they not fail'd in their private Application: For besides the most constant and useful Preaching, are we not furnish'd with a large Plenty of excellent Tracts and Systems every way fitted to confirm Men's Faith, conduct their Devotion, and regulate their Practice? And who but would hope that Topics which come so well adorn'd from the Press and the Pulpit, should leave behind 'em more lasting and fruitful Impressions? This, indeed, would be a sure way to establish the Interest and Credit of Religion, even amongst Atheists and Infidels, when they saw it not only live in Books, and finely painted in the way of Image and Description, but animated into Life and Practice, and thriving up into an universal Habit of Goodness. Were

P R E F A C E.

Were Piety and Devotion, Probity and Justice, Purity and Temperance, as carefully practis'd, as they are handsomly describ'd, it would be a very happy Return of these pious Labours, and every Man's Heart would soon convince him of the Beauty of Holiness. But alas! whilst these Subjects are consider'd merely as Essays to amuse the Mind, without any practical Tendency to better or improve the Man, we are not to wonder if among all these Helps the same Ignorancē continues, and the same Errors and Vices abound. For as a Man may fix his Eyes upon the best Piece of Painting, and yet not discern the Figure or Colours, the Light or Shade, if his Mind be diverted another way, so where Men's Thoughts are arrested by

P R E F A C E.

by Prejudice or Corruption, the most concerning Truths will slide by 'em like so many Shadows or Phantasms.

As for the Papers here offer'd to the Publick, I shall not venture to say a Word, or bespeak a single Vote in their Favour: They have got abroad, and must make their way as well as they can; only I would be allow'd to retire within the Comfort of my Intention, which was the doing some Good at least within the Compass of my Talents. I am very sensible there is not one of these Discourses but has its Faults, tho' none I hope so gross or numerous, as to exclude 'em from the common Grains of Candour and Allowance: And should it be esteem'd one, that they appear so late, and when the Wants of Religion are so well supplied, I
have

PREFACE.

have this at least to offer in Excuse, that till the End is gain'd, the Means should be pursued. And since after so many and so proper Methods of Cure, (in the Case of a very spreading Looseness and Immorality) the Disease has hitherto prov'd too stubborn for the Remedies, may I not be permitted to hope for some favourable Crisis, when a less Degree of Skill, attended by equal Zeal, and God's Blessing upon it, may help to appease or remove the bad Symptoms which remain. Beyond this I have no other View nor Concern; for as this Volume will hardly stand in the way of Censure, amidst so great a Crowd, and of the same Kindred, so am I very far from affecting any other Applause, than that which makes the
good

PREFACE.

good Man satisfied from himself:
*Tho' should I prove so happy to
promote likewise, in any competent
measure, the Service intended here-
by, I shall consider it as a double
Recompence of my Time and Pains,
beseech God to continue the Influence
of his Grace upon 'em, and bless
his Name for advancing so great an
End by so mean an Instrument.*

Tho. Davies.



10 FE 60

CONTENTS.



CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

THE Nature, Lawfulness, and abuse of Oaths consider'd, in the Example of *Herod*.

MATT. xiv. 9.

Nevertheless for the Oath's sake, and them which sate with him at Meat, he commanded it to be given her. Page 1

SERMON II.

The Folly of making a Mock at Sin.

PROV. xiv. 9.

Fools make a Mock at Sin.

p. 21

CONTENTS.

S E R M O N III.

The Providence of God asserted in the
Permission of moral Evil, from the In-
stance of *Joseph*.

GEN. xlv. 8.

*So now, it was not you that sent me hi-
ther, but God.*

P. 41

S E R M O N IV.

The Power and Wisdom of God illustra-
ted in the Frame and Structure of hu-
man Bodies.

PSAL. cxxxix. 14.

*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made.*

P. 65

S E R M O N V, VI.

The Death and Resurrection of *Jesus*
Christ, the Effects of his free Choice
and absolute Power.

JOHN

CONTENTS,

JOHN X. 18.

*I have Power to lay it down, and I have
Power to take it again.* p. 87, 108

SERMON VII.

God the Supreme and adequate Object of
our Love.

PSAL. xviii. 1.

I will love thee, O Lord, my Strength!
p. 128

SERMON VIII.

The Sin and Mischief of immoderate An-
ger, exemplified in the Instance of Jo-
nah.

JONAH iv. 4.

*Then said the Lord, Doeſt thou well to
be angry?* p. 148

CONTENTS.

S E R M O N IX.

The Evidence of the Scriptures for the Truth of *Christ's* Mission.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which testify me. p. 169

S E R M O N X.

The great Duty of Restitution explain'd and inforc'd from the Example of *Zacchæus*.

LUKE xix. 8.

And if I have taken any thing from any Man by false Accusation, I restore him fourfold. p. 189

S E R M O N XI.

The Nature, Design and Benefit of *Christ's* Temptation.

LUKE

CONTENTS.

LUKE iv. 13.

And when the Devil had ended all the Temptations, he departed from him for a Season.

p. 208

S E R M O N XII.

The Grounds and Pretences for the common Neglect and Contempt of Religious Duties illustrated from the Parable of the great Supper.

LUKE xiv. 18.

And they all with one Consent began to make Excuse.

p. 228

S E R M O N XIII.

The Dissolution of the World, an Argument for the strictest Holiness.

2 PET.

CONTENTS.

2 PET. iii. II.

*Seeing then that all these things shall be
dissolv'd, what manner of Persons
ought ye to be in holy Conversation and
Godliness!*

p. 248

SERMON XIV.

*The Duty and Excellence of forgiving
Wrongs.*

LUKE vi. 37.

Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.

p. 268

SERMON XV.

*The Duty and Advantage of Religious
Meditation.*

PSAL. iv. 4.

*Stand in awe, and sin not; commune
with your own Heart upon your Bed
and be still.*

p. 288

SERMON

CONTENTS.

SERMON XVI.

The Worship of wicked Men an Abomination to God.

PROV. xxi. 27.

The Sacrifice of the Wicked is Abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked Mind?

p. 308



SERMON

CONTENTS

SERMON XVII

The Worship of Wicked Men and
Angels to God.

Page xxi

The Sacrifice of the Wicked in
Angels to God.

10 FEB 60

NEW YORK



S E R M O N I.

The Nature, Lawfulness, and Obligation of an Oath.



MATT. xiv. 9.

Nevertheless for the Oath's sake, and them which sate with him at Meat, he commanded it to be given her.



WE have in these Words a memorable Instance of a rash and inconsiderate Action, which prov'd afterwards the too fruitful Parent of Cruelty and Injustice: and to render it on every side a

B

more

more efficacious Ground of Prudence and Caution, it stands surrounded with almost every Circumstance which tends to put the Mind off its Guard; and either by weakning or quite banishing the Succours of Reason, betrays Men into those Actions or Purposes which draw after 'em very sad Consequences. As for the Person here refer'd to, he was one invested with great Power, no less than that of a Tetrarch; an Eminence more likely to set him above the private Regards of Duty and Conscience; besides that he was at least half an Heathen in Principle, and had moreover all the Incitements of Mirth and Music, Jollity and Feasting to open his Heart, and dissipate his Thoughts, to lay the wise and wary Person asleep, and shew the Libertine in his true Colours and full Dimensions: It was, it seems, upon the Return of *Herod's* Birth-day, that the Daughter of *Herodias* danc'd before him, and so well pleas'd him (the better without doubt for being so near allied to his Brother *Philip's* Wife, who was now by a sort of incestuous

SERMON I. 3

cestuous Match become his own) that he made her a Promise more costly in the Event than the half of his Kingdom. And had he not left her to be her own Carver, nay even tempted her to the very worst Petition she could have prefer'd, he had sav'd his Conscience the Guilt of so criminal a Compliance: For besides the Cruelty, it was contrary to common Decency, as well as Custom, to pollute a Feast with Blood, and gratify his Genius with the Life of so great and good a Man; and we may conceive this to be one amongst other Reasons, why he became afterwards so sorrowful: But still we find his Grief was too weak for his Resolution, for thus the Narrative concludes; *nevertheless for the Oath's sake and them, &c.* In order to the more practical Use and Improvement of this Passage, I shall be obliged to examine it under the following Particulars.

I. I shall briefly enquire into the general Nature, Lawfulness, and Obligation of an Oath.

II. I shall more particularly represent the Rashness and Sinfulness of the Oath to which the Text refers: And,

III. I shall form such Remarks upon the whole, as may have the best Influence upon our Conscience and Practice. I am to consider,

I. The Nature of an Oath in general, for till that appears, we can determine nothing, on either side, in reference to its Fitness, or Power to bind or oblige. And since Men have but too much fallen into both Extremes, some treating the Name of God with so scrupulous a Reverence, as not to attest it upon the most solemn and useful Occasions; whilst others, by a more criminal Excess, use it with the profanest Contempt: It may tend in some measure to secure the Reverence due to this Part of Religion, if we enter into the Nature, and by that into the just Use, or Abuse of so solemn an Action. An Oath then is a direct and serious Appeal to God, or in other Words, a more sacred and formal Use of his Name to support the Truth of what we say; so that however
it

S E R M O N I.

it may be abus'd in the Use or Intention, 'tis really an Act of Religion. And thus, if to assert and affirm be to act, *Cicero* describ'd it long ago: But of this we have still a more competent Proof; for *Moses* commands the People in the sixth of *Deuteronomy*, *to serve and fear God, and to swear by his Name*; and the Schoolmen have, upon this Foundation, not only made it a Branch of religious Worship, but under the word Sacrament have chose to affix to it a peculiar Stamp of Holiness. Nor can we doubt the real Sacredness of an Oath, when the prime Object of it is God, and the Act itself a set and formal Appeal to him as a Witness to the Truth of what we affirm: For whether we have in our actual View or not, the Power and Justice, the Truth and Holiness of the supreme Being, in whose Name we swear, we cite him to the Matter of our Oaths, under this entire Character, and in Consequence we call him as a Witness or Observer; we invoke him, in the same Breath, as the Judge and Rewarder of our Truth and

Sincerity, or the Avenger of our Perjury and Falshood. Now since Men may prove true or false either in their Affirmations or Engagements; or if it will express it to better Advantage, since the Truth of our Words may either relate to something pass'd or present, or some future Conditions to be made good and perform'd: These being the two general Cases, wherein Oaths are thought proper to be us'd as the Tests of our Truth, or the Seals of our Faith and Probity, it has given Rise to the best and most useful distinction which can be made of an Oath, I mean into Assertory, or Promissory; the former is applied to clear or support the Truth of something already maintain'd, the latter as a Bond of Sincerity in respect both to the Intention and Performance of any present Promise and Engagement. And since Truth and Probity are things of so august a Nature and so practical an Influence; as it cannot be disputed, whether it be not Matter of a religious Cognizance to afford Credit and Currency to the Truth, so must it be lawful, in

Conse-

SERMON I.

7

Consequence, to use some stated Form to swear by, but still with this Restriction, that the Oath be duly circumstanc'd as to the Form, the Matter, and the Occasion.

The direct and proper Object is God blessed for ever; and since he is a Being that knows our Hearts, and can and will judge us according to the Truth and Falshood of them and our Tongues too, it appears not only fit and lawful, but extremely awful and sacred thus to refer our selves to the God of Truth, when his own Glory, that is, the Interest of Truth or Virtue require it. Thus the Apostle mentions it as the last and best Decision in Matters of Doubt or Importance, *that verily Men swear by the Greater, i. e.* by the great and supreme Being; for as to swear by those which were no Gods, was a mere Nullity, as well as a Sin, so are we forbid to swear by any Creature, because we cannot form the least; and I may add for this reason too, that they cannot be either Witnesses or Judges of such an Appeal, nor any way take the Forfeiture

of a wrong'd Faith, or injur'd Truth.

But an Oath, right as to the formal Object, becomes sinful, when the thing we assert, is directly contrary to Truth, or what we promise and engage for, is either evil in itself, or what we do not intend to perform, or know we cannot, whilst we thus bind our selves. If in Points or Facts simply affirm'd or deny'd the Truth be either disguis'd or falsified with our Knowledge or Consent, or if we do not know, but barely suppose that to be true to which we have set the Seal of an Oath; in that Instance we make the God of Truth a Witness, and as far as we can, a Party to the Falshood he hates, draw the Guilt of Lying and Perjury on our own Heads, and throw a fearful Scandal in the way of those who have been deceiv'd, if not farther injur'd by so gross a Perfidiousness.

Nor will every Oath stand yet justify'd, (of either kind already nam'd) unless the Motive too be worthy of the Action; for so solemn a Form must not be prostituted to every Trifle that comes
5 into

SERMON I. 9

into Men's Heads. What does not need an Oath, can never deserve one ; and there are few things that do, except such as fall under a Religious or Civil Cognizance ; in such Cases the Honour of God, the Peace of Mens Minds, and the publick Welfare of the World may depend much upon these sacred Attestations ; and an Oath, for Confirmation, may prove the Ground of Trust, and Commerce, as well as the End of all Strife : But to use upon the flightest or the vilest Occasions, *that Name, which is great, wonderful, and holy*, to swear vainly, as well as falsely by so awful a Majesty, this is not only a Profaneness which God has threaten'd to avenge, but 'tis an Iniquity to be punish'd by the Judge : And our own Laws have mark'd the Scandal and Wickedness of so vile a Practice in the Penalty they have affix'd to it.

Thus far we have examin'd the Nature and Lawfulness of an Oath : And after this View it will be easy to determine, that every one we presume to take in way of Confirmation is such a
Bond

Bond upon the Soul to exact and precise Truth, that if it be wilfully broken, it becomes an Evidence against us, and by a different Act binds us over to that Punishment, which God shall think fit to inflict for the Glory of those Attributes, which we presume to invoke to a Falshood; but the Oath recorded in the Text being of the Promissory sort, I am led now to enquire under my

II. General Head, into the Rashness and Sinfulness of it. Now the first we shall discern in the very making, and the other both in that and the Execution too. To survey it a little under the former Circumstance, there could hardly be any thing conceiv'd more hasty and precipitate, more rash and unadvis'd. A Faith so solemnly plighted upon so slight an Occasion, without any previous Thought, and in Terms so large and unrestrain'd, appear'd rather like a Phrenzy than a Favour, and in the mildest Construction, spoke a Mind without Ballast, and a Conscience without Scruple or Reflection: For if we may excuse, in some degree, the
bare

bare Grant of so lavish a Bounty, to
 the Force of Surprize, the Gaiety of
 the Spirits, and the Mirth of a Festival;
 yet what Plea can be made for that aw-
 ful and sacred Pledge, by which 'twas
 ensur'd? There might at least so much
 time have pass'd between the Promise
 and the Oath, as might have reduc'd
 the Prince to some degree of Recollec-
 tion; and by this means he had been
 able, and perhaps willing to correct, if
 not retract so extravagant a Motion;
 but when it was once seal'd by an Oath,
 the Conscience was retain'd, as it were,
 against itself, and a false Sense of Shame
 or Honour would help to keep it in
 the wrong. 'Twas a known and com-
 mon Rule among the *Jewish* and *Per-
 sian* Kings to swear in this indefinite
 Strain, *Ask what thou wilt, and it shall
 be given thee*; and of this we have Ex-
 amples in *Solomon* and *Ahasuerus*, as well
 as *Herod*: But however this might tend
 to the Credit of their Grandeur, it could
 never advance that of their Prudence or
 Piety; for besides the Rashness of an
 Oath made without Reserve or Condi-
 tion,

tion, it is moreover evil and unwarrantable in itself; the reason is, because by this means we yield our selves up to the Power of another, and enslave the Conscience, which before was free to make and direct its own Choices, to the Demands of Vice or Folly: So that if we should escape being ensnar'd by our own Imprudence, 'twere a mere piece of good Fortune; for having sworn and promis'd without St. James's Reserve, *If the Lord will*, or so far as the thing is just and right, we have in Effect tied our selves to make good any wicked or unreasonable Claim whatever. This was the very Case of *Herod*, and it made his Guilt still greater in the Execution of his Oath, than it was in the taking; for it now appear'd, when the Head of a Prophet was the Matter of the Petition, that the Matter of the Oath, which encourag'd it, was wicked and unlawful; and still more so, when the Orders were given for so bloody a Sacrifice. The whole Progress of this Tragedy was blind and rash, but the last Act highly wicked and barbarous: For when a Man binds himself

himself to commit Murther, whether directly, or in the Event, the Bond itself is void, because the Action is sinful; for no Man can be bound to any thing but his Duty, and there are two things, Sin, and Impossibility, which vacate the Performance of any such Engagement. So that if we swear to any thing which contradicts any one Law of God, we cannot keep that Oath without Sin, because we have called God as a Witness against himself. And here therefore, unless we would affront God by the Authority of his own Name, the only Remedy is, *to repent, and sin no more*, and by no means to add the Guilt of the Action to that of the Engagement. But it may be farther observ'd, that the Guilt and Sin of the Oath here mention'd, did not centre wholly in the Person that took it, but polluted the Conscience of the Receiver by the very Gift it convey'd; for here a young Person, who stood entitl'd by the Right of her Sex to Modesty and Tenderneſs, was unawares made an Accessory in Blood, and at the Instance of a cruel Mother,

and

and an unwary Prince, betray'd into Murther. 'Tis an agreed Point, that a Promise made to the real, tho' but temporal Damage of another, vacates itself, and much more an Oath or Engagement which involves a Man in Sin, and makes him a Party to his own Ruin; and tho' the *Psalmist* makes it part of the Character of his honest Man, that having sworn to his Neighbour, he does not *disappoint him, tho' it be to his own hindrance*, (because a Man may suffer that with Innocence, which he has no Right to inflict;) yet when a Man agrees to a Plot, or a Theft, upon the Faith of an Oath, he is not only a Thief or a Traitor himself, but contracts a share of their Guilt, whom he has betray'd or encourag'd into the same Crimes. It was not indeed by exprefs and deliberate Compact that the *Baptist's* Life was thus sacrific'd to a Frolick; but when it was made over upon the Force of a rash Oath, we do not find that either the Prince was ready to revoke, or the Damsel to cancel (as she might and ought) so wicked a Bond. 'Tis affirm'd
however,

however, that *Herod* was sorry, and this made him the more guilty; for 'tis plain it was a worldly Sorrow, and not to Repentance; a Sorrow that was over-rul'd by a Sense of Revenge, and the Memory of an honest Decision against a loose and lawless Passion; else why did he not repeal the Grant, disburthen his Conscience, and stop the Execution? We may believe this Fit of Concern sprang from a selfish or a popular Root; for he fear'd the People who esteem'd *John* as a great Prophet, and himself had heard him with Pleasure: And even a Sorrow rais'd by these Motives, shou'd have sav'd so innocent, as well as precious a Life; and since it did not, it became a new and accumulating Circumstance of Guilt, that a Conscience thus recoiling upon itself, could so gradually proceed to so foul a Murther. But 'tis time to leave the Fact, and offer,

III. Some Remarks upon it, which may best tend to influence our Conscience and Practice. Now the first to be made of the Instance before us, is the furnishing

furnishing our Minds with such just and awful Notions of the Majesty of God, as not to approach him without an holy Dread, even in a Wish, or a Thought; for since *God is in Heaven, and we upon Earth*, we Creatures every way frail and fallible, and God a Being infinite in Wisdom, Justice, Truth, and Holiness, it bespeaks the utmost Habit of Reverence when we engage in any Action which implies the least Relation to, or Intercourse with him. Thus shou'd we be dispos'd when we tread his Courts, repeat his Laws, and take his Covenant within our Lips; and since our whole Religion is nothing but that sacred Vow we have made to the Most High, is not the Name of God as Holy and Reverend, when invok'd as a Witness, as we know it to be when we presume to make it a Party's? Let us then consider what God is, and what it is to swear by his Name, (the one the great Object of all Religion, and the other a very solemn part of it) and this will place a wide difference *between him that swears, and him that fears an Oath*, and when-
ever

ever Justice or Piety exact this Duty from us, we shall regard God not as a bare Witness, but a just Avenger, and never presume to *swear, but in Truth, Righteousness, and Judgment.*

But, secondly, the Sin and Mischief of the Oath here referr'd to, is a loud Caution against that wretched and most impious Custom of using the Name of God to patch up the Flaws and Defects of a loose and empty Conversation. It can scarce be imagin'd, what lasting ill Fruits this rash and impetuous Habit of Swearing has produc'd; for tho it be commonly so sudden as to outrun Thought and spoil good Sense, and always so wild and irrational, as to want the usual Bribe of Profit or Pleasure to excite or excuse it, yet does it gain by degrees so fatal a Power over the Mind and Conscience, that the Man who has lavish'd so many vain and idle Oaths, that he scarce knows when he swears, will be in danger of swearing to any thing he does not know; And since this is Perjury and Profaneness in the same Act, it will be but a thin Fig-leaf

to cover his Guilt, that he forswore himself in an hurry, or that his Thoughts were absent, or his Conscience asleep, when he had most occasion to consult and employ them. How such heedless Profaners of God's Name will account for it at his Tribunal, it concerns 'em to reflect; but most certainly they can give their own Hearts no better Answer than this, that a vile Custom has fear'd them into Stupidity or Indifference, as to the great Points of Right or wrong, True or False, Good or Evil.

Once more: The Instance of the Text is a very instructive Lesson to Purity and Prudence, in the Conduct of our Thoughts, and the Course of our Conversation. A corrupt Heart is the great Seed-plot of Sin and Error, and he that is strongly inclin'd to any one Vice, stands a ready Prey for every one that shall beset him; and if this be a good Ground for an early Caution, 'tis still a better, that every Sin is, in the very Nature of it, a Departure from Truth, as well as Goodness, and an Habit of it is a State of Falshood and Insincerity, and will
entitle

SERMON I. 19

entitle a Man to that part of the Devil's Character, the *being a Lyar from the beginning*. We may daily observe, that those who have abandon'd themselves to any Wickedness, will think every thing lawful to skreen and defend it. Thus are Men led to affirm or deny, to protest and engage, to swear or imprecate, not as their Conscience directs, but as the Case or the Exigence requires. If a Theft or Lewdness has been committed, Shame and Guilt chuse rather to betake themselves to Lies and Shifts, and even Perjury itself, than to Confession and Repentance; and where the Conscience is defil'd, it will be as false and insincere to gain an Advantage, as to escape a Danger. This is a great Evil of itself, and it becomes worse if we happen to contract ill Friendships and Acquaintance; for then our Principles and Purposes are hardly our own; but we shall run blind-fold into rash Promises, bind 'em with sinful Oaths, and by a most fatal Complaisance, resign, with *Herod*, our Truth and Virtue to those that sat at Meat with us. But as these

C 2

things

things *happen'd to us for Examples*, let us so mend and improve by 'em, that *whatsoever things are true or just, honest or of good Report, we may think of these things*; and then the Reflection, assisted by the Divine Grace, will teach us so to guard our Hearts and govern our Lives, that we may always preserve a Conscience void, &c.



SERMON



S E R M O N II.

The Folly of making a Mock at Sin.



PROV. xiv. 9.

Fools make a Mock at Sin.



THE Book of *Proverbs* being a Collection of wise and useful Sayings, whereof the greater part has a practical Tendency, but very few any strict Dependence upon one another, we are therefore to regard the Words before us as a general Maxim, form'd upon Experience,

and containing a Truth, tho' much to be regretted, yet very fit to be known, that we may both learn and shun the wretched Practice of those Men, who sit in the Scorner's Chair, make Vice their Diversion, and turn Religion into Ridicule. Since there are such Men in this Age, as well as there were in that of *David* and *Solomon*, 'tis fit to distinguish both the Persons and the Principles by Marks of Infamy; and this each of them hath done in several Places, having stamp'd the worst Character of Reproach (for so Men account that of Folly) upon Atheists and Libertines, or perhaps it might be better express'd, upon more or less modest Unbelievers: For as there are several Steps and Advances in all Vices, so are there Degrees, or Aggravations at least, of Infidelity itself. Thus some are content to believe wrong and err by themselves, whereas others take a Pride to spread and propagate both their Vices and Mistakes; and as some value their Knowledge the more, when 'tis made free of the Publick, so do others think it little to be privately

privately wicked or in the wrong, unless they can boast and triumph in their Wickedness, and gain a Party to espouse it: These are they whom the wise Man observes in the second Chapter, *to delight in the Frowardness of the Wicked*. But all Error is Folly, and the Folly is the greater, as Men persist longer in, or take more pains to promote it. To this purpose the Psalmist votes that Person a Fool, *who hath said in his Heart, there is no God*; and the Author of the Text has bestow'd the same Name upon all Contemners of Religion; for, says he, *Fools make a Mock at Sin*.

I shall examine this Passage under the Following Heads, *viz.*

I. I shall shew what is meant by making a Mock at Sin, and that 'tis too common a Practice so to do.

II. I shall make out the egregious Folly, as well as Wickedness of this sort of Mockery: And,

III. I shall offer some Expedients which I conceive most proper to prevent or banish this Spirit of Profaneness.

I. Then: Not to detain you with the different Sense of Expositors upon the whole Verse, the *English* seems to have render'd the *Hebrew* Verb in this Paragraph by the most apposite and expressive Term; For when 'tis affirm'd that ill Men make a Mock at Sin, the Sense is not only clear and unforc'd, but more full and important, than if we read with the *Septuagint*, that they act or commit it; and the Apostle seems to make a pretty formal Distinction, where he speaks of some that not only led ill Lives themselves, *but took Pleasure in those that did so*. We may then take it for granted, that the Words point out a Set of thoughtless, as well as loose and lawless Men, who please themselves with Sin and Disorder, and take Delight in those Evils and Mischiefs, which are the proper Objects of Pity and Abhorrence. The Herd of such Scoffers is but too numerous, and they will be found to make a Sport and Mockery of Sin, not only in regard to the most shameless Practice of it in themselves and others, but in respect to the very Being and
Notion

SERMON II. 25

Notion, as well as the Issue and Punishment of it.

As for the Commission and Practice of Vice, it is grown so open and barefac'd, so greatly improv'd, and so freely caress'd, that it may be made a Question whether any Art or Science has been cultivated with half the Pains and Address, which has been us'd to bring Immorality into fashion, and nurse up a general Looseness of Manners. The Wits of these Days (which were the Fools in *Solomon's*) would appear desirous to make a Rank of Sinners by themselves; and if they cannot engross Iniquity, affect however to prescribe the Modes of it, and establish it by the too prevailing Law of a wicked Example. This might be made appear in all possible Instances of Corruption; for as there are Libertines of all Complexions, so does each make a Sport and Diversion of his own Folly, and congratulate himself, that he can add to, or refine upon those Vices which, alas, thrive too fast, and abound too much already. Thus does the Sot and Drunkard, instead of being ashamed of

so brutish a Quality, boast of his Mightiness to drink strong Drink : And Lewdness and Impurity, which the Apostle styles *Sins against a Man's own Body*, have yet gain'd so great an Ascendent in this debauch'd Age, that to be strictly chaste and modest are unfashionable Virtues ; and we may search far for a young Person of *Joseph's* Conduct, who will be so wise and wary to argue at this rate with his Conscience, *How can I do this great Wickedness, and sin against God?* I need not mention the wretched and vile Habits of Fraud and Cosenage, Lying and Dissimulation, with the gross and flagrant Contempt of God's Name and Worship, and every thing that wears the Stamp of sacred and serious : Even these profane Follies have their several Abettors, and the World is grown so bad, that Men do not usually content themselves with having little or no Veneration for Truth, Justice, or Piety ; but they seem willing to bring 'em under Disrepute, and laugh at those who have the Sense to own, and the Conscience to practise 'em. And no wonder then,

if

if Persons of so corrupt a Principle ridicule that Virtue and Sobriety in others, which they look on but as an empty Name, and have declin'd the Practice of as a sort of Disparagement. When Men are once grown so profligate to make their own Sins and Vices a Matter of Mirth and Raillery, they will of course proceed to make sport with other Men's, if it be but to keep themselves in Countenance: And this is the very Character the Psalmist bestows on such Libertines, that *they encourage themselves in Mischief.*

But neither do they only make the Practice of Sin their Diversion, but they stand farther prepar'd to explode the very Being and Notion of it, and laugh at the Punishment, as mere Fancy and Fiction. To mock at Sin may fairly suppose a profane Contempt of all that God has reveal'd about it; and if Sin be *the Transgression of God's Law*, he that dares make a Jest of such a Transgression, can have no serious Regard for the Law itself. And hence it is that loose and sceptical Men dispute the Truth,

Truth, expose the Manner, and deny the Consequence of original Sin: They find very naughty Propensions in themselves, but yet these very Lusts they will call the Law of their Nature, complain of those Fetters, which Reason and Conscience would put upon them, and contend hard *for that Liberty, which is the very Bondage of Corruption.* But then, when Sin and Wickedness are esteem'd either nothing, or the bare Faults of Men's Frame and Constitution, 'twill be a very ready Conclusion with 'em, (and we every Day find it to be so) that there could not want any, much less so very costly a Sacrifice and Atonement. Thus do these Scorners advance, from laughing at Sin as a mere Chimera, to disown or dispute the Ransom paid for it, and so in effect, to deny the Lord that bought 'em: For does not this profane Mockery extend thus far, when Men would have their Sins cancell'd without a Ransom, or assign the Payment to any Being less than God? But

But the Spirit of Profaneness does not stop here; for as bad Men make Sin a Trifle, and the Remission of it a mere Problem, rather than an Article of Faith; so is nothing made the Matter of more Scruple, and bolder Censure, than the Torments of Hell. If they are at all own'd by the Scorners in the Text, 'tis in such a Sense as affronts the Majesty of God, and the Justice of his Laws; for either they are not eternal, or Spirits shall not feel 'em, or rather than God shall punish the Wicked, the Flames of *Tophet* shall be but painted over, and the Worm that never dies, mere Figure and Metaphor. Indeed the worst Men are not commonly so hardy, to sport directly with Damnation; but when they so often and so heedlessly call down upon their own Heads the worst and last Evils that can be dreaded, when their Souls are so often pledg'd to the Prince of Darkness, to vouch a Trifle, if not a Lye, to humour Custom and gratify the Temper of the Loose and Profane, who can imagine that such Persons do seriously believe there is a Devil, or a

Place

Place of Torment; or if they do, would not brand 'em for the most desperate Set of Idiots, that have ever appear'd in the World?

Having thus far made out the Wise Man's Remark, that *Fools make a Mock at Sin*, I proceed, according to the Method propos'd, to shew under my

II. General Head, Wherein consists the special Folly, as well as Wickedness, of this sort of Mockery.

That 'tis highly wicked, needs no other Proof than this, that it speaks a most deprav'd Habit, and is not any one Sin, but all Sins put together. For he that boasts of Vice, must certainly delight in it; and what is this but a Spirit of Immorality heighten'd by Insolence and Perverseness? To harbour a Thought of God or Religion that is unworthy of either, or to think well of Sin or Sinners, whom God abhors, is a very high Presumption; but to take pleasure in Wickedness, or blow the Trumpet before it, as the *Pharisees* did before their Alms, this certainly is the most open Defiance to the Laws, and therefore the grossest

grossest Indignity to the Nature and Attributes of God. It looks, indeed, as if these Libertines thought in Contradiction to the Apostle's Assertion, that God himself was to be mock'd; and that is such a Pitch of Profaneness, as nothing can exceed, unless perhaps the Folly of it may do so, which will easily appear in more than one or two Instances.

And the first may be this, That Sin is the vilest and most degrading thing we can think of. There is no Blemish of Nature, or Disadvantage of Fortune; no Weakness of Mind, Deformity of Body or Wretchedness of Condition, that can justly draw upon us so much Contempt, as the open abetting of Vice and Lewdness: For as God fram'd all these, so are they good in some respect or degree; but Sin is none of God's Production; it stole into the World when Reason was asleep, and Conscience off its Guard; and as in the mildest Notion it implies the Absence of all Good, so is it truly and strictly the Source of all the Evils we feel or fear. If we cast our Eyes inwards, we shall find our Reason dethron'd

dethron'd by it, and our Passions lifted into its Place : Nor is our Will left so far Mistress of her Choices, as to make one of a thousand either wise or good ; so that the Mind is wholly blinded by Error and Mistake, distracted by vain and foolish Desires, and has so strong a Bent to the wrong side, that 'tis a Question not to be answer'd, *How can he be clean that is born of a Woman?* But if this be the exact Portraiture of Sin, that it has defac'd God's Image in us, and well nigh levell'd us with the Beasts ; that it has made us averse to the divine Life and Laws, and sunk the Dignity of our Beings : Are these Circumstances we should be proud or fond of ? Or will the Ruin of our Innocence ever prove a fit Object of our Mirth and Mockery ? Never certainly, 'till Men are arriv'd at so reprobate a Sense, as to call Evil Good, and Good Evil, and glory in their Shame, as well as mind earthly Things.

For besides that, 'tis extremely vile and foolish to place our Diversion in that, which is our foulest Disgrace : To
sport

sport with Vice, is openly to arraign and insult Virtue, which is the most amiable thing in the World: 'Tis the great Law of untainted Nature, and those that have not perverted it to the last degree, will praise and commend, even where they do not practise it. Hence it is, that good Men command a silent Homage, where-ever they go, and bad Men cannot help wishing, in their sober Intervals, that they were like 'em; and as far as a decent, exterior, and a fair Appearance will go, they affect to be so. Thus Virtue carries her own Seal of Approbation; and as this speaks the Law written on Men's Hearts, it must argue a strange Depravity, to live, and even triumph in those Sins, which are the direct Reverse of it, and as gross a Folly, without doubt, to allow our selves in those things which our own Hearts must needs condemn: For after all, those very Persons who in one Mood affect to be esteem'd the frankest Indulgers to Sense and Pleasure, would (in another) take it ill to be thought, or call'd the most impious and profane.

D

This

This is an Imputation which the very worst are apt to guard against; and since the Character of a bad Man is never worth owning, it is an odd piece of Folly, and next to an Infatuation, that some, by making a Mock at Sin, should take so much pains to deserve it.

And yet still the biggest Instance of Folly is behind; for if the Christian Religion be true, (and 'tis styl'd, we know, the very Pillar and Ground of Truth) 'tis then clear, that whoever makes a Jest of Sin, does so of Damnation likewise; for unless the Cause and Effect could be parted, *the Wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all they that forget God.* So that to sport with Vice as an innocent thing, or to turn into Ridicule that Penal State which hereafter awaits it, is nothing better (in respect of Prudence or Safety) than to play with the Flames of the bottomless Pit. These are *those Terrors of the Lord, by which we* endeavour, with the Apostle, to *persuade Men*; and were their Truth less evident, 'twere Madness to risque so

SERMON II. 35

invaluable a Treasure as Life Eternal, upon the Drollery of a loose and profane Tongue, or the brutal Pleasure of a sensual Life. But since we have all manner of Proofs which either the Nature or Truth of God can afford, that Sin shall not go unpunish'd, since it has already cost the most precious Blood that ever was shed, and is in itself so heinous a Deviation from Truth and Goodness; the Folly must be the grosser in sporting with it, by how much the danger is greater of being ruin'd and undone by it. For if it be true, or were it but merely probable, *that God shall judge us by our Works*, it will be found in the result, that Sin has mock'd and cheated us into a lamentable Destruction, and made sad Reprizals upon us, for so long making it our Mockery and Diversion. In a word, if there be a Day of Recompence, Sin will certainly prove the Cause and Object of the greatest Horror; and that is enough to prove that Mirth Folly, and that Laughter Madness, which it excites or employs at present. But 'tis time to apply

some Remedy to so dreadful an Evil, and I shall attempt it by offering,

III. Some very brief Expedients to prevent or remove it.

And the first may be the taking in an early Tincture of Virtue and Religion. This will certainly have the force of an Antidote against the Poison of ill Principles; for a Breast that is already season'd with awful Notions of God, will of course hate Sin and pity Sinners, but cannot ever make sport with that which is the most humbling Circumstance that attends them. Now the true Method to inspire Men with a real, as well as lasting Humility, is to acquaint 'em that they are born Sinners, and go *astray from their Mother's Womb*; and surely when they have once well learn'd that they are Heirs of Corruption, and for that reason, of Wrath and Vengeance, they will look on Sin, not with Pleasure, but with Abhorrence. To fix as well as raise these Sentiments, is the Business of good Discipline, and a sober Education; and when young Persons are *brought up in the Nurture and Admoni-*
tion

tion of the Lord, they are put in a fare way of escaping the Pollutions that are in the World, and not being led astray with the Error of the Wicked. 'Tis among the vulgar and untoward Part of Mankind that these profane Mockeries do so much abound; and those who make boldest with the Truths and Precepts of Religion, are commonly the meanest of the People both in Sense and Station. I have observ'd with Pleasure that the higher Ranks of Men are much the freest from this sort of Corruption; and this is in a great measure the Effect of a superior Judgment, handsome Notions, and an happy Institution. These are Talents which set Men above the little Follies of Jestings and Drollery, especially upon such awful Points as Heaven and Hell; and as Grace and Reason well employ'd, will preserve every one from so wretched a Folly, so are they likeliest to meet and thrive in that Breast where the Seeds of Virtue are sown betimes. To go on therefore,

2. To guard off this profane sort of Folly, we cannot more usefully employ

our selves than in the daily and repeated Exercife of religious Duties: I do not mean the more retir'd Devotions of the Clofet, (which yet will tend very much to compofe us to an Habit of Seriousnefs) but thofe constant Returns of Publick Worfhip, wherein we acknowledge God the Father and Searcher of our Spirits, the Maker of Angels and Men, and the great Lord and Judge of the World. Thefe are Attributes, which we cannot prefent to our Thoughts, without an humble and holy Dread; but when we approach this awful Being, as a God able to kill, and to make alive, whole *Mercy forgives Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin*, but yet whole Power can *destroy both Body and Soul in Hell*: When we daily implore at his Hands the Relief of our Wants, and the Pardon of our Sins; when we appear at leaft to honour him with our Prayers and Praises, confeff our Frailties, and difburthen our Griefs before him, and beg his Grace to amend our Lives; if in the midft of fuch heavenly Employments, we can ever find our
felves

felves in the Humour to applaud Vice, or condemn Piety, to encourage Sinners, or make a Mock at Sin, it would shew an Effect, at least an Hypocrisy, not to be parallell'd. But on the other side, when Men seldom frequent these sacred Offices, they forget God, and slight Religion of course; for Contempt and Neglect are nearly allied, and there is no great distance between the not serving God with Fear and Reverence, and *committing Sin with Pleasure and Greediness*. But to conclude, that we may neither profanely scoff at Sin nor Religion, let us remember, and lay it to heart, that every Man must give an Account of himself to God; an Account which will take in our *idle Words*, as well as wicked Thoughts and immoral Actions. Whatever we may think of Sin now, it is so grievous a Disorder, that the divine Justice *would not spare the Angels that sinned*; and since Man was made for God's Glory as well as they, *shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* And shall he not reserve the Ungodly unto the Day of Judgment to be punish-

ed? Let us therefore *not rejoice in Iniquity, but rejoice in the Truth*: Let us endeavour to honour God with our Lips as well as Lives, stop the Mouths of Gainsayers, and banish out of the World the profane Spirit of Atheism and Unbelief, so shall we *assure our own Hearts before God*; and if we prove the blessed Instruments of *converting many to Righteousness, we shall shine like Stars in the Kingdom of our Father*.



SERMON



S E R M O N III.

The Being of Evil reconcil'd with
the Goodness and Providence of
God, from the Example of *Jo-*
seph, &c.



GEN. xlv. 8.

*So now, it was not you that sent me
hither, but God.*



THESE Words are deliver'd
by *Moses* under the Person
of *Joseph*, and they are a ve-
ry just Conclusion formed
upon a long and strange Series of E-
vents, of which himself makes the Sub-
ject,

ject, and wherein we may discern at one View those two great Opposites, the Goodness of God, and the Wickedness of Men, and find Scope enough to lay the Guilt and Blame of our vilest Actions where we ought; not upon the Fate of our Nature, or the Crasis of our Blood and Spirits, but the Choice of our Will, and the free Compliance of the Mind and Conscience. The Foreknowledge of God is certainly a Truth as clear as his Being; and the Freedom of Man's Will is no less obvious, than the several Actions perform'd by it: And since these are very clear and distinct Ideas in themselves, the best way not to confound them, or perplex our own Minds, is to keep them asunder, and consider them as the Properties of Beings at an infinite distance from one another. But vain Man would be wise! so wise as to make Heaven and Earth meet together; and if he cannot reconcile this divine Prescience with the Notion of human Liberty, he will ascribe all the Good or Evil in Men's Actions, either to a foreign Decree, or mechanical

nical Impulse. But let Men lay their faults, as they will, upon the Frame and Texture of their Bodies, the Influence of the most fullen and ill-natur'd Planets, if the Soul acts by her self in any one Instance, we must in that Instance at least exclude the Power of any fatal Impulse; and for the same reason, in all our moral Actions, because they proceed from one and the same uniform Principle.

And this I hope to make appear from the Passage now in View, which being founded on a Matter of Fact, amounts to no less than a sensible Proof, that in every bad Action which requires the least degree of Time or Thought to ripen or compleat it, 'tis the Mind that sins, and God and Nature stand clear of the Imputation. Thus did *Joseph's* bad Brethren pursue him with the most chosen and deliberate Malice, because God and his Father loved him: And tho' this injur'd Person bemoan'd and pity'd, carefs'd and pardon'd this inhuman Fraternity, yet he cannot forbear laying their Sin before 'em in this just, tho' gentle Reprimand, *As for you, ye thought*

thought evil against me, but God meant it for good: Words which may serve to illustrate those I have now chosen; So now, *it was not you that sent me hither, &c.* I shall examine these Words in the following Method.

I. I shall shew in what Sense, and under what Restrictions, the Action here mention'd is ascrib'd to the Providence of God.

II. I shall endeavour from this and other Instances, to reconcile the Permission of Sin, or moral Evil, with the Goodness and Justice of God's Providence: And,

III. I shall point to the moral Uses we are to make of this Passage. And,

I. Tho' the divine Providence (which is nothing else but God's Conduct and Continuance of Things and Beings in the Order he has plac'd 'em) be too deep an Abyss for Man to fathom; yet as we are permitted to trace his Works and, from the Marks of Goodness and Wisdom we find in 'em, obliged to conclude that the Being which fram'd 'em is wise and good; so when we talk and
reason

SERMON III. 45

reason upon things, which for want of fitter Names we call Chance and Accident, we are allow'd to ascribe 'em to God as the prime Source of every thing that is, or can be; but then it must be so, as not to invade the Honour, or divide the Unity of these Attributes. To apply this Rule to the Instance of the Text, the Person who was so ill treated as to be design'd a Sacrifice, and really sold for a Slave, plainly declares that 'twas God, and not Man, which sent him into a foreign Country. And we may fairly charge the Event upon Providence, if we do but fix the Guilt of the first Contrivance in the right Place, and distinguish as well as this good Man did what part the Hand of God directly acted in this Affair, and what he barely permitted to be done by the Hands of Men: Upon this View, it will appear that the Cruelty practis'd upon *Joseph* at home and by his own Flesh and Blood, and the Advancement he met with abroad and amongst Strangers, were owing the first to the permissive, and the latter to the active Providence of God.

In

In pursuit of the first Part of the Distinction, I observe, that the Design form'd against the Life of this Person, could have no Cause but the prepenſe Malice of the Hearts that form'd it. They were thus far the Agents, as well as Instruments; and what they did was not only from the Dictates of a barbarous Nature, but with the full Bent and Career of a wicked Intention; so that Providence was indeed a Witness to the whole Scene, but without contriving or abetting the least Part of it: And when one of this vile Crew express'd a degree of Mercy beyond the rest, it may be truly said he had the less Sin to answer for; not because his Temper was better, but because his Conscience refus'd to go the same lengths in Wickedness. Nor is this the biggest Instance where the Providence of God has barely not hinder'd, what the free, tho wicked Wills of Men resolv'd upon. The Death of Christ himself was determin'd by the Counsel of God, and yet *those Hands that slew him*, are pronounc'd *Wicked*; so that whilst the Issue was appointed, the Manner

SERMON III. 47

ner and the Means depended on the free Actions of Men: For who dare so much as imagine, that an Apostle of his was doom'd to betray, the Sanhedrim to impeach, *Pilate* to condemn, or the *Jews* to crucify him? Instead of this, the different Degrees of Remorse express'd in several Instances by the Judge and the Traitor, plainly prove they had sinn'd against the Light and Remonstrance of their Conscience, and were now condemn'd by the Verdict of it. But we are still to observe from the Instance of the Text, that even this passive Providence (if I may so call it) made room for the most shining and illustrious Acts of it afterwards: For had it not been for the Spite and Malice of his Brethren, *Joseph* might still have kept his Father's Flocks, and we had not read such Wonders of his Greatness and Goodness in a foreign Country. So that whilst these bad Men were the Authors of nothing but their own Sin, God was pleas'd to over-rule the whole Scheme, and conduct it to an Issue the most glorious to himself, and advantageous

tagious to the injur'd Party.

And here then begins the active Part of Providence in this Affair; for after all the gradual Advances made in this wicked Project, the very Men, which were so lately the sole Actors, were now no more than blind Instruments in the Hand of God to bring about an Event they never thought of. For what but the immediate Finger of God could have *enlarg'd Joseph's Feet into a Place of Liberty*, and made him the Steward, as it were, of divine Providence, to dispense the Stores of one Kingdom, and relieve the Barrenness of another? That a Person so lately doom'd, as far as human Malice could do it, to Misery and Thralldom, should not only be freed from both, but advanc'd to a Capacity of doing so much good, that his greatest Enemies should want and receive it at his Hands; that the one should be preserv'd to repent of their Crime, and the other to forgive it, and both Parties be brought together, at such a distance of Time and Place, and upon so very critical a Conjunction: This has all the Signatures
of

SERMON III, 49

of a visible Providence ; and as God by this Action even forc'd *the Wrath of Man to praise him*, the rescued Party had abundant reason to argue as he does in the Text, *So now it was not you, &c.* And this leads me to the

II. Point, The reconciling the Permission of Evil to the Goodness and Justice of Divine Providence. And here I do not consider Evil in the widest Extent, but that, which is call'd moral Evil, with respect to the free Agent that commits it, the bare Permission of which, will not impeach the Goodness or Justice of Providence, and that for these two Reasons at least.

I. That God acts by fix'd and stated Laws ; and having made the World, and all the Creatures in it, he chuses to govern 'em by those several Motions, Instincts, and Principles he has planted in them. And as Man is a free Being, and capable of performing Actions contrary to one another, he will act by this Freedom so long as he continues the same Creature : To rob him of it, is to sink him into a mere Brute or Machine ;

E

and

and as this must quite destroy the Being and Distinction of Virtue and Vice, so would it quite invert the Order of Things, cancel the Laws of the Universe, and turn human Nature out of its proper Chanel. But therefore God will not destroy even Sin itself, (at present I mean) nor quite abolish that Law of Liberty, upon the good or ill Use of which the Order of this World and the Judgment of the next, the Glory of God and the eternal State of Man, do so nearly depend. I do not affirm, (at the same time) that the Mind is so equally free to Good or Evil, as to chuse and pursue what is best without any Let or Impediment; for I readily allow our corrupt Passions and Appetites are very great ones; but still there is left us such a degree of Freedom, as will exclude mere Force and Compulsion, and that on the side both of Grace and Nature, the two great Springs of Action in us.

As to the Point of Grace, even this divine Principle does not compel and force us either to chuse the Good, or refuse the Evil; nor is there any reason
it

SERMON III. 51

it should ; it is enough to the purpose of our Happiness, that it moves and excites, kindly persuades or gently restrains us ; and if we do not improve a good Motion when God has put it into our Hearts, the Guilt will be ours, and the Goodness and Justice of God stand for ever acquitted. That we may resist, or even quench the Spirit of God, is certain ; but if it be a fault so to do, it must be that we are free likewise to obey it ; and since our Minds can act thus far on either side, what need of any fatal Impulse to do or hinder that which will be better effected by that Principle of Liberty which God has establish'd in us ? Could Providence have thought fit to supersede all the Effects of Sin at the Cost of that Order God has fix'd in the Nature of Things, we may believe the fallen Angels would have kept their first Station, and our first Parent even wanted the Curiosity of tasting a Fruit so fatal to himself and his Posterity ; but they were made free, and must the Justice of God suffer, because they abus'd this Freedom to their

own Ruin? To adjourn from this Instance to that of the Text, 'tis clear that God might have prevented the very Intention of Mischief, in those wicked Complotters, either by taking their Lives, or chaining up the natural Powers and Faculties by which 'twas concerted: But this was out of the common Road of Providence; and it was fully enough to discharge that and condemn them, that the Design itself was so shocking, so very contrary to the first and deepest Impressions on their Minds, that Reason and Conscience must needs recoil, and those are the properest Restraints for free and moral Agents.

But then, if we are not forcibly acted upon by Grace itself to avoid Sin, we are so free on the side of Nature (as corrupt as she is) that she cannot drive or compel us to any form'd Act or Habit of Wickedness. That we are *conceived and born in Sin*, is a great Disadvantage; and corrupt Desires and Propensions are a strong and dangerous Byass upon the Will; But surely that which only weakens, cannot be said to destroy it; and tho'

tho' in many things we offend all, God forbid it should be true, that we do and must offend in all things, even those that most depend upon our Choice and Freedom. Admitting then we cannot quite extinguish a bad Desire, we can endeavour to do so, and regret our own Frailties; and if we do it sincerely, must these earnest and honest Essays to be holy, just, and good, pass only for Vices in disguise? Or that free Attempt be call'd a Sin, which is the only proper Method to avoid it? Or rather, is there not more Truth as well as Charity in the Poet's Aphorism, *Virtus est vitium fugere*, 'tis one degree of Virtue to avoid Vice? As for mere Sins of Constitution, they are ours by Tradition only; but those of Will and Choice are in the nearest and strictest Sense all our own; and as the Psalmist makes a wide difference between Sins of Frailty and Presumption, upon the Sense and Experience of his own Freedom, so does St. Paul himself, who exalts the Succours of Grace as high, and sinks those of Nature as low as may be, acknowledging

thus much, that *with his Mind he obeys the Law of God, though with his Flesh the Law of Sin*, Rom. vii. 25. But then if we can serve God with this higher Faculty in spite of the Efforts and Motions of our mere animal Frame, what must become of those wild Positions, which make a bad Texture of Soul and Body accountable for the worst and vilest Actions? Which subject Reason to Fate, instead of our Actions to that, and would have Man to be, not an Agent capable of moving himself, but a mere Engine driven to and fro by the Force of two contrary Impulses, and both irresistible? If the Case be thus, can the Libertine have a better Plea for any Extravagance in Belief or Practice, than that he finds such Instincts in himself, and will not therefore, because he cannot, resist them? That he moves like the Hand of a Dial, or the Wheels of a Watch, by the Force of the first Impulse? That his Will is chain'd up, and his Soul entirely passive as to the Matter of Good and Evil? At this rate of arguing, may not the lustful and intemperate,

perate, the cruel and merciless protect their Vices under the Shelter of their Constitution, and even the Envy of *Cain* be made an Excuse for the Murder of his Brother, the Sight of *Bathsheba* for the Adultery of *David*, and the thirty Pieces of Silver for the Treason of *Judas*? At least if Men blame Nature for all they do, will they not arraign God at the second hand for bestowing that Nature upon 'em?

But neither is this the whole Mischief of this untoward Doctrine; for to be bound under Sin in such a Sense as not to attempt our Deliverance, is the State of Devils, and not of Men. 'Tis indeed their Nature to sin, nor can they do otherwise; but still this is a moral Necessity, and the mere Consequence of an abus'd Freedom. They were free once, and that they are not still so, is the Punishment of their Sin, and not the Fault of their first Frame; and till we forfeit the same Privilege, and wilfully fall into such a *reprobate State*, as *that we cannot cease from Sin*, God will preserve it to us, as a Means and Instru-

ment to bring us, with the Concurrence of his own Grace, to Heaven and Happiness; and they that oppose this Freedom, do but disprove themselves, and shew that they have it, by the very ill use they make of it. But I am now to offer,

2. Another Reason why God does not always prevent or hinder the Sin and Evil that is in the World.

And we must allow it for a good one, that he both can and does produce the greatest Good out of it. For since he is the Lord of Nature, and takes in at one View things past, present, and to come, so that the longest Chain of Causes and Effects is within the reach of his Knowledge and Power, he can dispose and qualify the worst Cause to produce the best Effect, or so over-rule it, when his Wisdom shall so direct, as that the Mischief shall be but private and personal, whilst the Advantage is in many respects extensive and general: And if God suffers the Sin of one to punish the Sin of another, and perhaps himself at the long run, and by this means serves the

the great End of Providence, the Welfare of the World in general; the Evil God thus permits will turn to the Honour of all his Attributes, and only to the Shame and Confusion of the Authors. Thus does the Blame and Guilt of a most wicked Intention lie upon the Heads of those who conspir'd against the Life and Liberty of a Brother, when at the same time it not only acquits, but glorifies the Justice of God, who wrought so much Good from it, and meant to do so. 'Tis true, that amongst Men, he that is privy to an evil Action, and does not all he can to hinder and prevent it, contracts the Guilt of a Principal, as well as a Party; for we are commanded *to rebuke our Brother, and by no means to suffer Sin upon him*, Levit. xix. 17. And when we act otherwise, we break a Rule of Justice as well as Charity; for since we can look no deeper than the Surface of Things, and know Sin to be a Breach of God's Law, and can only judge of the Evil that is in it, without foreseeing what Good may come out of it, much less being able to produce that Good;

58 S E R M O N III.

we stand, upon those and other Accounts, liable to the Guilt of that Evil we can, but do not hinder. But now God, as the first and supreme Being, tho' he cannot make Evil to be Good, yet he both can and does make so good an use of the worst Actions, even of the worst Men, for the Trial of good Men, the Correction of Sinners, the Conduct of the World, and the Glory of his Government, as will baffle all Objections upon this Head. Could the Wit of Man have foreseen, that the casting *Moses* into a River could have ended in so glorious an Issue, as that he should be made the Friend and Favourite of God, receive from him a Table of divine Laws, and not only be a Mediator between God and his People, but a Guide to lead, and a Prophet to instruct 'em, by so many Statutes and Miracles so many Years? And when the Sin of Malice had cast *St. Peter* into Prison, did not that Mercy shine the brighter, which commission'd *an Angel* to break his Chains, and guard him out? So that when the Result of the worst things not only
is,

is, but is design'd to be, thus good and happy, and *the Counsel of the Lord is sure to stand, be the Devices of a Man's Heart* as many and wicked as they will; this will clear the Providence of God from the Charge of approving, however it may for the present permit and bear with the Sins of Men. I shall now make a short Application, and so conclude.

And I observe, first, from the Doctrines here laid down, that tho' God permits Sin, and brings Good out of it, yet will not this excuse or palliate one evil Action, or render the Doer less accountable. To permit or suffer Sin, does neither approve the Action, nor cancel the Guilt, but is a mere Suspension of Punishment, a bare Reprieve of the Sinner, till that great Day of Reckoning, when *God shall judge us according to our Works*; so that if we sin wilfully, that very Freedom which acquits the Justice of God in the Permission of Sin, will condemn, and not justify Man in the Practice of it. For even whilst God is pleas'd to bear with us, our Conscience acts in his stead, and revenges up-
on

on us the Guilt of our Actions; so that the longest and largest Permission of Sin, instead of being a Proof of our Innocence, will be a great Aggravation both of our Guilt and Punishment; nor will it be any Plea or Protection, that God brings Good out of the Evil we commit, for the Evil is as certainly ours as the Good is his; and since in many Cases the bare Intention is the Sin, what can it avail us that God conducts a bad Means to a good End, and works some Advantage we never dream'd of, out of that Mischief we really design'd? Should a Man level his Dagger at the Throat of another, and by opening an Impostume save that Life he design'd to destroy, the Guilt and Sin of the Design must lie upon his Head, tho' God was pleas'd to defeat the Success. Upon the whole then, if we must not do the least Evil in order to produce the greatest Good, much less must we do it with an evil Mind and Intention, upon the Presence that God may extract Good from it.

Again:

SERMON III. 61

Again: Since Providence derives so much Good, in the Result, from the worst Things and Actions, is not this an Argument for the firmest Trust, and the most enduring Patience? For since the most afflictive Evils must have an end, and may have a good one, and are always just in their Issue and Progress, we have abundant reason to *wait the Lord's leisure*, and hope the best under the most dismal Appearance. What tho' our worst Enemies are suffer'd for a while to revile and slander, to persecute and oppress us, was not *David* climbing to a Throne all the while that *Shimei* curs'd him? Did not the Malice of *Haman* procure the Rise of the *Jew* whom he hated? And have not thousands sprung and reviv'd, like so many *Phoenix's*, from the Ashes of a Fortune sunk and ruin'd by the Pride, Rage, or Avarice of wicked Men? And what then becomes of our Murmurs against Providence? Or why should we either wonder or repine at the present Successes of bad Men, when some sudden and unlook'd for Change may enable us
to

to say with the Psalmist, *I went by, and lo! he was gone; I sought him, but his Place could no where be found.* And since then 'tis the last Event crowns every thing, and God will make all things, even the Evil of Sin as well as Punishment, to work together for the Good of those that love him; 'Tis a good reason to bear the present Lot with Patience, because the worst in Appearance, may be the best in the Issue, and we do not know what Blessings God has yet in store for us.

• But let us (for a Conclusion) make this use likewise of what has been said upon the Conduct of Providence, so to reflect upon our Sufferings, whether occasion'd by our own Sins, or those of other Men, as to adore and praise God for our Rescue and Escape. 'Tis a common Ingratitude to charge God foolishly under the Smart of our Sufferings, but when 'tis over to forget at least, if not deny the Power and Goodness that deliver'd us. This was a Charge, and a very just one, upon the Children of *Israel*, that *they would seek*
God

SERMON III. 63

God early in their Afflictions, but within a while they forgot his Works. And we too can own with them, that Troubles do not spring out of the Dust, tho' we are too blind to see the Hand that works our Escape. Instead of this, when Men plunge out of a bad State into a better, they do not say with *Joseph*, 'tis God that brought me hither, but the ill part of their Lot they cast upon Providence, and the good one they ascribe to themselves. Whilst they are punish'd or distress'd, the Correction is God's, and they will spurn against it, as too severe; but if God lifts 'em from the Dunghil, and makes their latter end better than their beginning, then 'tis Chance and Fortune has done all, or perhaps their own Skill and Conduct may have some Share in the Success. Thus is God defrauded of the Glory and Merit of many kind and tender Mercies, and that because *an unwise Man doth not consider, and a Fool doth not understand 'em*: But we have a Precedent in the Text that instructs us better, and may the same Spirit of Gratitude dispose every one of us to *praise the*

*the Lord for his Goodness, and declare,
&c. So shall he still direct and guide us
in all our ways, and protect us with his
Favour, as with a Shield; he shall hide
us under his Wings, and we shall be safe
under his Feathers; and in a word, he
shall bless both our going out and coming
in from this time forth for evermore.*



SERMON



S E R M O N IV.

The Power and Wisdom of God illustrated in the Frame and Structure of human Bodies.



PSALM CXXXIX. 14.

I will praise thee ; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made !



HERE is so near an Agreement between the Creation and Providence of God, between the Power, Wisdom and Goodness that form'd, and that which governs and sustains the World and

and Man, and all the Creatures; that it will not be thought a very wide step to advance from the Defence of the one to the Illustration of the other. This indeed is a very large and instructive Theme, and the Geometry of the smallest Insect is not only enough to employ the Pen of the most ready Writer, but to baffle the Learning of the wisest Observer. But then Man, the Flower and Quintessence of God's Works, will still better deserve and repay our Enquiry into his Make and Frame; for as God made every thing *in Number, Weight, and Measure*, so did he form Man after the exactest Plan and Model within himself. Upon this Account he is styl'd a Little World, and that more than in a Figure; because he bears the exactest Analogy to the Parts and Substance, as well as the Order and Motions of the Great One. Now the Royal Prophet, who employs a great part of his sacred Compositions in the Praise and Glory of God, does in several of them consider the Works of Creation and Providence together, as if on purpose to afford him-

self

SERMON IV. 67

self the fuller Scope to adore his Maker for the Order, Beauty, and Symmetry which appears in both. And this seems to be his View and Design in the Psalm now quoted: He begins with God's unbounded Knowledge, and Acquaintance with the Nature and Essences of Things; from hence he falls into the serious Contemplation of his own Make and Frame, and whilst he owns that God *saw his Substance yet being imperfect*, and took an exact Survey of every Part and Member, when he, as yet, subsisted no where, but in the Idea of his Maker; it will be no way strange that so fair a Prospect should work him up to the Warmth of this pious and pathetick Resolve, *I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made!* The Words contain a Duty, and the Reason of it; and since by the Words *fearful and wonderful*, the Psalmist seems to denote the Power and Wisdom of God, I shall suppose his Goodness likewise implied, because *his Mercy is over all his Works*, and proceed to examine this Passage under the following Heads.

I. I shall endeavour to display the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God in the Make and Structure of Man:

II. I shall offer some special Arguments from our View of the human Composition, to praise and adore these Attributes: And,

III. I shall shew what other Improvements, in reference both to Faith and Practice, may be made of this Subject. To begin with the

I. The Display of the former Attributes in the Make and Formation of Man. Here I must propose a very general View, since it would exhaust a Volume to dwell long upon such a Complication of Wonders; but the Skill and Goodness of the Artist will appear in Instances enough that are plain and obvious to every Eye. For the entire Frame and Structure of our Bodies, (even that part of it which is outward and visible) speaks Grandeur and Majesty, as well as Beauty and Proportion; so that the very Form and Aspect of Man, (abstracting from Reason his best and biggest Distinction) might easily pronounce him

Lord of all the Creatures. God has given him a Look and Posture erect to Heaven and himself, and lodg'd his Understanding in the highest and noblest Seat.

If we proceed to the System of the Nerves and Muscles, they are design'd as a Prop and Bulwark to the whole Frame, since they so assist and support the loosest and more fluid Parts, as to preserve the entire System from falling asunder; so appositely true is that of *Job x. ii. Thou hast cloathed me with Skin and Flesh, thou hast fenced, &c.* Nor is the Eye or Ear, the Head or Hand, or indeed any Part or Member of the human Body less admirable in its Make and Structure, or less useful in the several Offices assign'd to it. What but the Wisdom of Nature (which we may term the Art of God) could have fram'd Instruments so well adapted as the two first of these, to reflect Sounds and Colours by the different Mediums of Light and Air? And is not the Hand formed with such a wonderful Pliancy of Joints and Muscles, as to serve the Occasions

both of our natural and civil Life, and answer any Directions the Soul shall prescribe? I do not here speak of the various and pleasing Sensations that arise within us from the several Objects without us. But certainly the Distinction of Tastes by the Palate, of Notes by the Ear, and Forms and Figures by the Eye, besides the different Affections from the Smell and Touch, are a Chain of Arguments to prove the Skill, as well as Bounty of the divine Artist.

Were we farther to dissect our Frame, and look within our selves, the Heart itself (I do not here mean the Thoughts of it; for they are still a greater Secret) is a double Wonder in its Texture and Position; for it consists of such Fibres and Arteries, as serve for Channels to convey the Blood, and by that a due Stock of Heat and Spirits to the several Parts: So that it may well be call'd the Source and Fountain of Life, for the Pulses of it beat the first and cease the last of any Motion in us. And because it may the better discharge the great Trust of supplying Heat and Vigour

gour to the whole Body, the Hand of Providence has plac'd it as near as may be in the very Centre, that so like the Sun, it may diffuse its Influence on all sides.

Nor must we pass by one singular Provision which God seems to have made for the publick Welfare and Happiness in one Part of our Composition, I mean the amazing Variety of Features which appear in the Faces, and the surprizing difference we may observe in the Speeches of Men. Now this is a Diversity (at least as to the Degree of it) peculiar to Man, but not certainly without a wise and merciful Intention; to prevent, we may suppose, that Disorder and Confusion, as well as Danger and Mischief which must arise from a more exact Likeness. For should there be a common and near Resemblance not of all to all, but of most to most, what must become of all Traffick and Commerce? Or what room for Evidence in Judicial Cases, if there were not proper Marks of Distinction in the Speech and Faces of several Individuals? So

that this kind of Variety, as well as that we may find in the Parts and Functions of the human Frame, is a strong Proof not only of the Greatness of God's Power, but the Fruitfulness of his Wisdom. And here we may very well use the Psalmist's Apostrophe, *O Lord! how manifold are thy Works, in Wisdom hast thou made them all.* And this indeed will appear more fully the farther we extend our Search, for as many and various as the Parts or Members of the Body are, there is not one too little or too much; but the divine Architect has so equally steer'd in this, as well as his other Works, between Defect and Redundancy, that he has pronounc'd it good and perfect; and so it must be, since not only every Part of our Frame directly answers the several Ends and Uses it was fram'd for, but ministers, in its turn, to the Beauty and Harmony of the whole: So that, as the Apostle observes, *the Eye cannot say to the Hand, I have no need of thee; nor the Head to the Feet, I have no need of you,* 1 Cor. xii. 21. There is not, I think, one Instance

SERMON IV. 73

stance already nam'd, whether taken from the entire Bulk, the distinct Parts, or the various Properties of the human Frame, but what loudly speaks a divine Wisdom and Omnipotence. But then if we consider this Body as the Shell and Case only of a nobler Substance, and by much the meaner Part of our compounded Nature, and reflect on the vast Advantages which result from those Laws of Union which God has fix'd between the Soul and Body, we shall be oblig'd to join in the same grateful Disposition with the Psalmist, *I will praise thee, &c.* And this leads me to the

II. Thing propos'd, the offering some Arguments from the View of our Make and Structure, to praise and adore our great Creator. Now the chief Grounds of Gratitude, being Goods or Benefits receiv'd: Our Praise and Thanks upon this Head will be best founded on the Powers and Capacities which this compounded Nature affords us towards this great Duty. For tho' God has not thought fit to range us in the Class of pure Spirits, he has given us such a
Texture

Texture, that tho' the Mind shall not act at present without some Dependence on the Body, it shall use and command all the Parts of it, as it pleases: Now

The first Advantage arising from our Composition, is our common Perception, or the Notices we take in from outward Objects, by the way of the Senses: And this we may assign as the first Ground of our Praise and Homage, For whether or no all Knowledge depend upon these Images of Sense, and we cannot reach abstracted Truths any other way, the very perceiving of Objects, and the Distinctions between 'em, with the reflex Acts which the Soul is able to form upon 'em, is a mighty Privilege, and will for ever challenge our biggest Acknowledgments. But this we could not enjoy from the most artful Texture of the Muscles and Organs, had not God plac'd a Soul within us ready to receive, and capable to retain these friendly Notices; for 'tis the Soul that sees by the Eye, and hears by the Ear, and by every Part and Pore of the Body admits Sensations of Pleasure and Pain;

Pain: And even this latter Perception Pain itself calls for our Praise; for 'tis a kind and constant allarm to provide a Remedy when we are affected, and a proper Caution to guard against the next Assault. I shall not here enlarge upon the working of our Fancies even in Dreams; and our performing the noblest and most agreeable Functions of Life, when we are fetter'd in Sleep, the very Image of Death.

— But I proceed to the Benefits arising from a social Life, and which nothing could afford or support, but such a Frame as God has been pleas'd to bestow upon us. Were it not for the Powers of Memory, and those Tracts in the Brain which preserve the distinct Images and Impressions of Things and Persons, the Endearments of Relation could not be known or practis'd, nor the Distinctions settled between Friend or Enemy, a Brother or a Stranger: So that the Duties and Offices of civil Life must have remain'd like a Country undiscover'd. But now as God has in this regard made Man fit for, and desirous of the Pleasure

sure and Intercourse of a social Life, he has compleated him by the peculiar Talent of Speech for all the Functions as well as Pleasures of it; for he has Organs so fitted as to frame distinct and articulate Sounds, and can convey his Thoughts and Ideas under 'em with as much Ease and Truth, as Light conveys Colours to the Eye: It having pleas'd God to connect such and such Images to certain Words and Sounds; so that let Voices and Languages differ as much as they will, Men are capable of understanding one another in the particular Tongue they converse. And hence arises the most sovereign Pleasure Mankind is capable of: For by this means the common reason of all Men and Times, and Places, is put as it were into a joint Stock, and human Nature improv'd by a free Intercourse of Thoughts and Notions. Hence it is that every Part of Conversation is polish'd and adorn'd, whilst Men by imparting Knowledge to one another, grow wise and learned, and often good too by the mutual Interchange of Reasoning and Discourse;

SERMON IV. 77

course: For without a Tongue, what Counsel or Advice could be given or receiv'd for the publick Good? Or could Virtue subsist, Friendship thrive, or Arts flourish? In a word, would a Man differ from a Brute, or a City or Commonwealth from a Den or a Wilderness, were it not for the happy Privilege of Speech, and those Instruments by which 'tis form'd? Whether we shall use or need these in another State, must remain a Question till we arrive there; but surely they are so great an Ornament as well as Convenience to us in this, that they call for our richest and most constant Acts of Thanksgiving.

Nor can I mention any higher Advantage of our present Make and Constitution, unless it be this, that it disposes and fits us for the great Duty of Religion, I mean the Practice of it, according to the present Order and State of Things, and the Constitution of the World we now live in. There can be no doubt but the Soul shall exert, by her self, freer and purer Acts of divine Contemplation, when she is stripp'd of this

78 S E R M O N I V .

this Load of Flesh, and wears a Vehicle better suited to the Actions of a Spirit ; for we shall then see God as he is : But since we are confin'd, for some time, to look through a Glass darkly, 'tis a blessed Advantage that the very Images before us transmit some Resemblance of their great Author, and enable us to say that he is wise in Heart, and mighty in Strength. And as these Notices of God from the things without us fill our Hearts with Wonder, and our Tongues with Praise, and are or should be the Subject, as well as the Motive of our private Devotions ; so are we fitted by our entire Make and Frame for a more publick and united Homage and Worship. This at present must be visible and local ; for tho' there be but one Communion of Saints, yet must it be differently manag'd according to the various States and Functions of Men and Angels. And thus has the Goodness of God empower'd us, by the Consent of a free Choice, as well as the Faculty of a natural Motion, to meet and unite in his Praise and Service. We can by joint
and

SERMON IV. 79

and mutual Addresses implore his Aid, and deprecate his Anger, and glorify his Providence, and even please and edify our selves by the visible Harmony of our Prayers and Praises. Now when we not only adore God with the Tongue, *the best Member we have*, but lift up holy Eyes as well as Hands *to the Throne of Grace*, and bow our Knees to God and the Lord Jesus, and present our Bodies as an holy and living Sacrifice to both; these are Acts of Religion proper to our Nature and Circumstances. And as we have abundant reason to praise God for so framing us, that we can pay this reasonable Service with Ease and Pleasure, so have we to charge the Presumption of those who would act as pure Spirits before their Time, and lay aside those Rites and Gestures, which speak us Men, and among other things, distinguish the Church Militant here, from that which is triumphant in Heaven. I come now in the

III. And last Place, to shew what farther Improvements may be made of the divine Wisdom, and other Attributes in the human Composure. The

The first is, that we can hence demonstrate the Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism; for if the meanest Production in Nature, an Ear of Corn, or a Spire of Grass, will direct us up to a first Cause, much more does the very Consciousness of our own Being suppose one superior to it; and the next Step leads us to that God, in whom we live and move. To suppose that either Man made himself, or existed from Eternity, must end on either side in a gross Contradiction; and to derive him from Chance is a wilder Fiction than the Teeth of *Cadmus*: So that the last and best Appeal must be to a first, all-wise, and omnipotent Agent. For what but infinite Power and Wisdom could have temper'd Elements without Life and Sense into so elegant and curious a Fabric, and inform it with a Soul able to move and actuate the minutest Parts of it? As this Motion prevails or ceases, we either live, *or turn again to our Dust*. He that can contemplate in himself such Motions and Powers, and yet be an Atheist, must at the same time be a Monster and
not

SERMON IV. 81

not a Man; for why should not the Beauty and Proportion of this lesser World direct him to a first and supreme Being, as well as the Works and Motions of the greater? And yet the Book of the Creation taught the Heathen World the whole of their Religion and Worship: At least when they fail'd in it, they are charg'd with abusing the natural Light of their Minds; for says the Apostle, *Rom. i. 20. The invisible things of God from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.* And since Man then is fram'd in the very Image of God, it must be a stupid Blindness indeed, not to discern the Artist in the Work, and confess God in so lively a Transcript of himself. But we may hope there are few or none of so gross an Unbelief; for tho' Fools will make a publick and profess'd *Mock at Sin*, yet *they say but in their Hearts, there is no God.* And if one Age has produc'd a *Vaninus* so weak as well as wicked to fall a Martyr to that Opinion, we may justly affirm

that

G

that

that he acted out of kind, and should have been sent with *Nebuchadnezzar* to recover his Senses by grasing with the Beasts. But then a second use to be drawn from hence, is the certain and special care of a divine Providence over a Creature so fearfully and wonderfully made. This indeed is a Consequence from the other; for to preserve and continue things in the State they were fram'd, is so near akin to creating them, that 'tis the same uniform Act of Power and Wisdom carried on from the beginning to the end of Time. And so watchful has the Eye of Providence been in this respect; that from the time that *Adam gave Names to the Creatures* there has not been one Species of Beings lost. But if God takes so provident a Care of the least valuable Creatures, that *not a Sparrow falls to the Ground without his leave and Cognizance*, may we not reason with our blessed Lord, Is not Man of more value than many Sparrows? To deny, with *Epicurus*, a special Care and Inspection in the Deity, upon the wretched Pretence, that it would mo-
lest

SERMON IV. 83

lest his Repose, is to deny his Being, because it makes it like our own, subject to Weariness and Decay: And 'tis much the same Phrenzy as to form a World from a Jumble of Atoms. For we may as well believe Order and Beauty could spring out of such a Confusion, as that God, a perfect and infinite Being, could suffer any by his Care and Government of the World; and when with respect to Man we find it expressly affirm'd, that even *the Hairs of his Head are all number'd*, we cannot doubt but the same regard will be had to the greater Concernments of his Being and Welfare.

Once more: We may collect from the Power and Wisdom of God in our Make and Frame, what may and has been done, by the Concurrence of the same Attributes, in that new and better Creation, the Redemption of Mankind. For since God is and will be to all Ages the same all-wise, good, and powerful Being, can we think it a Work less worthy of these Perfections to restore Man, by the Methods he did, to the divine Image he had defac'd, than to

84 SERMON IV.

make him at first after so bright a Copy? And here then may we not stand and wonder at the Insolence of the Deist, who tho' he pretends to read a supreme Being in the Volume of his Works, and so is asham'd to deny the Existence of a God, yet can by no means digest the Truth of his Revelation, or consent to one Mystery therein contain'd? But is not every thing in Nature, as to the Cause or *Modus* of its Essence, a perfect Mystery? Or can we *search out* the Works of God, any more than *God himself to Perfection*? And why then should Men doubt or disbelieve the Works of Grace? There is the same Author of both; and since nothing is too hard for God, may we not as well conceive an infinite Power joining two Natures in one Person, as well as unite a Body, Soul, and Spirit in one Nature? To pass on to that important Article the rising of our Bodies, why *should it be thought incredible that God should do this*? Where is the difference in respect either of Power or Wisdom, to form a Body from the Dust,
and

and to rebuild it from the same Particles? And the God that *breath'd into Man's Nostrils the Breath of Life*, may he not command with the same Voice, *Come again ye Children of Men?* So that to argue from any seeming difficulty against an infinite Power, must be great Arrogance, as well as Blindness; because all things are equally possible to such a Power. But then it must follow too from our Make and Frame, that God can and will judge us hereafter; for our Conscience tells us so now, and our Powers of acting are such as seem to demand an Account from us; and then why should not God judge us at the last Day, when he has in all respects form'd us for such a Trial, has taught us to expect it, and transacts a Part of it within our selves?

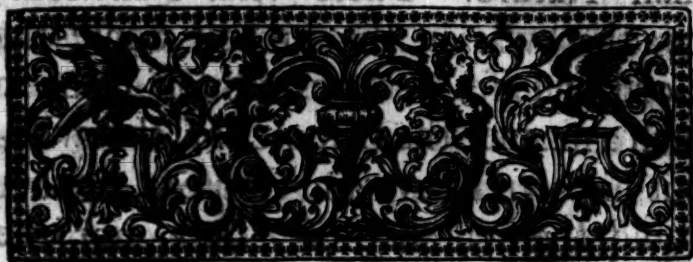
But I conclude, lastly, with this Use to be made of the Frame and Texture of our Bodies, that we employ 'em solely to the Honour and Glory of the great Maker: This is the ultimate End of all our Actions, and the Apostle refers the most common and indifferent ones to

86 SERMON IV.

this End, *for whether we eat or drink, we must do all to the Glory of God*: And how much more should we keep our selves from all Filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit? How strictly are we oblig'd to guard our Hearts from Pollution, our Eyes from beholding Vanity, our Hands from Acts of Fraud and Injustice, and our Feet from being swift to shed Blood? In one word, since our Bodies are the Temples of the Holy Ghost, let us preserve 'em chaste and temperate, pure and blameless to the Day of *Christ*; and then we shall receive 'em fresh, vivid, and immortal, and praise God for ever among *the Spirits of just Men made perfect*.



SERMON



S E R M O N V.

The Death of *Jesus Christ* the Effect of his free Choice.



JOHN x. 18.

I have Power to lay it down, and I have Power to take it again.



THE first Clause of this Verse, and the latter Paragraph of the former, refer plainly to those Powers of Life and Sense, which were common to our blessed Saviour with other Men, when he

was pleas'd to adopt and wear the human Nature. These vital Functions, he, that was in the highest Sense the Lord of Life, declares himself to be in such a manner the Disposer of, that without his own Leave and Consent, neither could the Sentence of *Pilate*, nor the Malice of the *Jews* have depriv'd him of 'em. This was a Truth as requisite to support the Faith and Hopes of our Lord's Disciples, as it was for them to believe that *all Power was given him both in Heaven and Earth*. For when his Death was found to be, not the common Debt of a mortal Nature, but the free Result of his own Choice; and when he made himself appear, by rising from the Dead so soon after, *the Son of God with Power*; this must needs amount to a good Evidence, that *he became for us a most prevailing High-Priest*. That this was the great End of his Sufferings, he endeavours to make appear in a very apposite Parable, wherein as he represents himself the Shepherd, the whole World his Fold, and those his Sheep who should embrace his Religion, whether

whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*; so the better to express his Love to his Disciples under this borrowed Character, he declares himself ready in the Words foregoing to feed and nourish, sustain and protect 'em; nay he stands prepar'd at the fifteenth Verse to *lay down his Life for the Sheep*; not barely to surrender it to those, who were so eager to draw the Curse of his Blood upon 'em, but to offer it as a *Ransom for the Sins of many*, to bequeath it as a Legacy to a lost and undone World. And this we find in the Words now chosen, *I have Power to lay down my Life, and I have Power to take, &c.* I shall examine the former Part of these Words, as suitable to the Subject of our Saviour's Death, and reserve the other for the more glorious Occasion of his Resurrection. What I have now to offer will be fitly compriz'd under the following Heads.

I. I shall enquire into our Saviour's Meaning, where he affirms that he has *Power to lay down his Life.*

II. I shall examine the principal Ends which he design'd to serve in so doing.

III. I

III. I shall shew the Uses that are to be made of the immediate Duties which result from this special Act of Love and Condescension.

I. I begin with the Sense and Import of the Clause ; and it will appear at the first View to intend a great deal more than a bare natural Power or Capacity of acting, or a full Command over one's own Will. For in the former Sense, a free, tho' never so frail an Agent, may pretend a Power (an unjust and usurp'd one) over his own Life : And even in the latter, a mere Man may be able to form the most full and vigorous Intention, where, at the same time, it may be controul'd by some outward Violence. But our Saviour, who was more than Man, uses a Style of Authority in this Place, and such as speaks the Power mention'd by him, to be supreme and infinite : For as any lower Degree of it must have discover'd him to be no divine Person, so for that reason could he neither have been a true and real Saviour. The Power therefore which our blessed Lord here claims over his own Life,

SERMON V. 91

Life, must needs be a Power of Right and Dominion in respect of its Original, and an infinite and unbounded Power in regard to its Extent : And as these Properties infer one another, so 'tis highly requisite they both should meet in one, whose Blood was to cancel so immense a Debt, and to ransom so many Millions of Lives from Death and Hell.

That Christ had a rightful Power over his own Life, so as to lay it down, when, for what Ends, and in what manner he pleas'd, none can possibly doubt, who considers him as the *Word, the Power, and Wisdom of the Father* : For being co-equal with God in all these respects, he owed not his temporal Being to any other, and could not therefore stand accountable how he should think fit to dispose of it; and 'tis on this Ground he is properly said *to give himself for us, and to make his Soul an Offering for Sin*. As Christ was the Lord of the Creatures, and all things in Heaven and Earth subsisted by him; so in laying down his Life he did but make over his own Propriety; and certainly it was
lawful

lawful for him to do what he would with his own; and because it was his own, the Freedom of the Gift made room for the Value of the Purchase, and the same Life was accepted as a Bequest and a Sacrifice. But who of all Mankind (our blessed Redeemer excepted) was able to say in the same Sense with him, *I have Power to lay down my Life?* No; the Breath we draw is not our own; but as we hold it by a free Charter from that God, in whom we live and move, so must we wait his Summons to lay it down; and if we do so without his leave, we may be said to invade his Right, and steal our selves out of the Hands of his Providence. Indeed whenever we resign our Lives in God's Cause, or at his Command, he may please to accept 'em as a kind of Oblation: But in this Case the Commission comes from God, and the Right of Disposal is his, not ours; so that had *Abraham* presum'd even at the Call of an Angel, to take away the Life of his Son, or even to have parted with his own, it had been Murder and Injustice, and

SERMON V. 93

and not either a Gift or a Sacrifice, and that because no Man can give what is not his own. But now the blessed *Jesus* had not only a rightful Power to lay down his Life,

But he had moreover a full and absolute Power on both sides, either to undergo, or avoid his Sufferings. *Life and Death were*, in the most literal Sense, *before him*; and he was not only capable to chuse and refuse, but to be either really active or passive, as his own Will should incline him. 'Tis true, that as our blessed Saviour chose to put on a mortal Nature, he was, in that regard, liable to the common Lot of such a State. But notwithstanding that in chusing the Cause, he might be justly said to chuse the Effect; the *Fulness of the Godhead still dwelt in him bodily*, and this put the whole Chain of Causes and Effects so absolutely in his Hands, that it was no more possible that any outward Violence should (without his own leave) have reach'd him, than that *the Pains of Death should hold him afterwards*. To this purpose he asserts in the Context,
that

that *no Man took, i. e.* could take *his Life from him*; and when *Pilate* urg'd a pretended *Power to crucify or release* him, our Lord replies, *He had no more than what was given him from above*: And as he had more than once exerted his Power in escaping the Hands of the *Jews*, because neither their Hour nor his was yet come, so we find him declaring in the very Article of his Surrender, that a single Prayer to his Father (and we have his own word, that his *Father and he were one*) would have soon furnish'd him with an heavenly Guard of *more than twelve Legions of Angels*: Thus true is it that our blessed Surety had a full liberty to drink or refuse his bitter Cup. But since he speaks his Compliance in this chearful Form, *Lo I come to do thy Will O God*: we are still to conclude that when so wise and good a Person would chuse a Death he might have escap'd, and that an accursed one, a Death loaded both with Pain and Reproach, he must have very great and glorious Ends to pursue, and very wise and important Reasons to press him forward. But then, when we
find

find him crying out with so affectionate a Concern, *that he had a Baptism to be baptiz'd withal*; it points out to us that some great End was to be serv'd by this Act of Condescension, and what nobler End than this, *that whosoever believeth in him should not perish*, &c. And this leads me on to the

II. Head of Discourse, the enquiring what Ends our blessed Lord design'd to serve in laying down his Life for us. Now the Scriptures (which are our best Warrant in this Case) direct us to regard the blessed *Jesus* as our Sacrifice, our Advocate, and our Example. These were the several Parts of that Province he was pleas'd to undertake in dying for us; and the Ends propos'd in this Undertaking, must thereforc be the redeeming us from a State of Misery, the entitling us to a State of Blessedness, and the setting us a perfect Pattern of Submission and Patience. To take them in their Order:

Our blessed Lord freely suffer'd the Death of the Cross, that by nailing our Sins to it, and bearing 'em in his own Body, he might make our Peace, and purchase

purchase our Pardon with God, and for ever blot out the *Hand-writing of Ordinances against us*. This was the very first and formal Intention of his Passion; and tho' every Part of his Life; and the whole OEconomy of his Humiliation might have a subordinate Tendency to this and several other Ends; yet the Colours and Characters he most frequently wears in holy Writ, are those of a *Ransom* and *Atonement*, a *Saviour* and *Redeemer*, a *Λύτρον*, or *Propitiation*. Indeed the whole State of Man, consider'd as a Sinner, is describ'd (in the Language of the New Covenant) as a State encumber'd with a vast and uncancell'd Debt; and if we respect God as the injur'd Creditor, the Image will appear very just and natural on both sides, and we shall borrow from it an excellent Reason, why Christ should become a Proxy or Surety for a whole Race of Beings, and his Life retrieve the Forfeiture of ours. For if we look into the Nature of Man, or the History of his Fall; if we regard him as a Creature, or a Sinner; if we view him in his

his State of Innocence or Guilt, he was, in all these respects, a Debtor to his Maker: For as a Subject he owed him Obedience, and as a Transgressor he owed him Punishment. How soon Man sinn'd, we know too well for our Ease and Happiness, and what he deserv'd for it, if Reason does not, the Scriptures will inform us; for *Sin is the Transgression of God's Law, and the Wages of Sin is Death*. The Case then standing thus between God and his Creature, *i. e.* an injur'd Law-giver and an offending Subject, it must be evident (without enlarging upon our degraded State) that either God must depart from his Right, (I might have said affront his own Attributes) in remitting this Debt without any Compensation, or he must demand it from Man; a Creature, alas! by infinite degrees too poor and insolvent: Or he must lay the Weight of our Sins upon the Head of a Proxy that was able to cancel, as well as bear 'em. But this last he chose to do, and by a Decree concerted between the eternal Father and Son; a Decree most wise and

H gracious

gracious in itself, glorious in respect of God, and happy for Mankind! The Penalty was transferr'd, and our Pardon both purchas'd and seal'd by the blessed *Jesus, the Captain of our Salvation.* Thus then did, and thus it behoved *Christ to suffer:* For tho' there be some who have receiv'd so deep a Taint of the *Socinian* Poison as to dispute this Point, it might be decided, one would think, by the Prophet's *Prolepsis*, that *Christ was punished for our Transgressions, and that the Chastisement of our Peace was upon him.* But we have the Harmony of the New Testament to second the Authority of the Old, since our Lord's Embassy into the World was this, *to seek and to save those that were lost:* Neither, says *St. Peter*, is there *Salvation in any other.* But then to shew in what manner we are sav'd, *St. Paul* likewise tells us, *we are bought with a Price:* And we may learn the Value of the Payment in another Place, for we are *redeem'd, not with corruptible things, but with the Blood of Christ*, who because he was born to be a *Prince and a Saviour,*

SERMON V. 99

viour, did therefore die for our Sins, and rise again for our Justification.

And this will let us into another End design'd to be advanc'd by his Death, I mean the entitling us to eternal Blessedness. For tho' to pardon and reward are things widely different, and there is no natural Consequence from the not suffering eternal Death, to the blissful Enjoyment of eternal Life; yet in the Order of Grace God has been pleas'd to allot that our Pardon shall be the Earnest of our Happiness, and that those whom *Christ has justifi'd*, he shall fully *glorify together with himself*. So that allowing Forgiveness of Sin to be the immediate Fruit of his Purchase, the Joys of Heaven for all the Faithful are the just Crown and Reward of his Obedience. This was so full and perfect in all the active as well as passive Instances of it, that it was able to merit as well as atone for us; and as it advanc'd the blessed *Jesus to the Right Hand of God*, it shall render those that believe in him the *Heirs of Salvation*. Nor is there any Privilege better ascer-

tain'd to us than this; for *Christ* himself speaks to all his future Followers in the Persons of his Disciples, *Eo ! I go to prepare a Kingdom for you.* And he that vouchsaf'd to die as our Sacrifice, is now acting as our Advocate, and will one Day allot us our Reward. And tho' 'tis true, that this glorious Reversion was not fully ensur'd till our blessed Surety was risen from the Grave, and ascended to his Father; yet these were Effects so very certain, and the Cross of *Christ* so near an Advance, (nay the very Entrance into his Glory) that we must plainly discern our Happiness in Heaven to be one great End of his Sufferings.

I shall but barely mention a third, as subordinate to both these, and that is, the setting us a perfect Pattern of Submission and Patience. These are truly divine and heroic Virtues, and as they are peculiarly fitted to the State of those who fight under the Banner of the Cross, so are they press'd upon 'em by the most binding Precepts and the most persuasive Promises: For we are commanded

to suffer for *Christ's* sake, and pronounced blessed when we do so. But yet, as high as the Commands run, and tempting and glorious as the Rewards are, there wanted still a Guide to conduct us through so incumber'd a Road; for however short our Christian Race may be, it lies, we know, *through a Vale of Tears*; and 'tis not only the common Lot of Men, that *Briars and Thorns* are with 'em, but of those that *will live godly in Christ Jesus, that they must suffer Persecution*. So that when the way to Heaven lies through a Field of Blood, or a fiery Furnace, the wisest Rules would have wanted Force to carry us through so rugged a Discipline. 'Tis true that our blessed Lord *spoke as never Man spoke*, and gave the best and most powerful Lessons for an holy Life in general: But as his own Example was the greatest Spur to the other Virtues he taught, so, that *Patience might have her perfect Work*, there wanted still more, the Influence of so great a Pattern. And since therefore the holy *Jesus* was pleas'd to *endure the*

Cross, and despise the Shame, we may well admit it for one Reason of his doing so, that he might become, not the *Author* only, but the *Guide and Captain of our Salvation*. But I now hasten in the

III. Place, to the practical Uses to be made of this Discourse.

And the first Duty to be learnt from it, is a warm and affectionate Sense of so rich a Mercy; such an Habit of Gratitude as may serve at once to furnish our Hearts with Reverence, our Lips with Praise, and our Lives with Piety, For if on all Occasions, even the Health and Welfare of our Bodies, the common Goods of Life and Fortune, and the present, sensible, and fading Advantages of our Beings, it so *well becomes the Just to be thankful*, how much more for that abundant Grace, by which they are so freely and fully justify'd? Most certainly if Benefits receive their Estimate not barely from the Bulk and Largeness of the Gift, but from the Quality of the Giver, the Temper and Manner with which they are bestow'd,
and

SERMON V. 103

and the Wants and Distresses of those that receive 'em, we must stand indebted in an infinite Sum of Thanks to our blessed Redeemer: For the Purchase made for us, is not a Treasure *that Moth or Rust can corrupt*, but one *that fadeth not away, eternal in the Heavens*. To endear which the more, 'twas the pure Effect of a most free and disinterested Good-will; a Love that sprung not from the Merit of Man, but the Mercies of God; for it stands rais'd (by this distinction) above the brightest Character of Friendship, that *whilst we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us*. How ill, alas! must it have far'd with Man, if he had wanted so powerful, as well as kind a Proxy, *to bear his Griefs, and heal him with his own Stripes*? But besides that our Case was so forlorn and desperate, as to groan under the Weight of a Guilt we could not remove, and the Dread of a Vengeance we could not atone. What Friend had we even among the Angels, able to have succour'd so abandon'd a Race? They shall now indeed, through the Goodness of

him that sav'd us, *minister to those who shall be Heirs of Salvation*; but as no Price but the Blood of Christ could cancel our Debt, so to that alone we owe our Pardon and Peace, and for that we owe the Tribute of Glory, Honour and Praise to God and the Lamb for ever. But then Gratitude is no barren Principle, as it stands oblig'd to make Returns, such as it can, to the Bounty bestow'd, and 'tis therefore

A second Use to be made of this great Benefit, that we live and demean our selves as Persons ransom'd at so vast a Price, and *walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called*. Now we are called to Holiness, and the Inference is, that we *worship God with our Bodies and our Spirits, which are his*. Our blessed Lord has redeem'd us from Sin as well as Death; and since we are *buried with him in Baptism, how shall we that are dead unto Sin live any longer therein?* No, Christ has not rescued us that we should live as we list to the World or our selves, but to the Glory of God. Our Pardon depends upon
some

some Conditions, tho' they are easy and gentle; and if we ever hope to be happy, we must study to be holy and perfect. Did Christ then both come and suffer in the Flesh *to purify to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works?* Let us not continue in Sin that Grace may abound, but bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance. In order to which, let us not only reflect upon the Merit and Value of Christ's Sacrifice, but exhibit the whole Scene of it in the way he has appointed. Did he instruct us in the Nature and Virtue of his Passion under the hallowed Symbols of Bread and Wine; let us eat and drink in Remembrance of him; and when our *Hearts are sprinkled from an evil Conscience*, draw near with Faith, and take this holy Sacrament, so shall we even *taste and see how gracious the Lord is*, and in the same blessed Act recognize God's Mercy and our own Deliverance, improve our Graces, enlarge our Comforts, and receive the Earnest both of our Pardon and Happiness.

But

But to conclude: Since *Christ* our Passover is sacrific'd for us, what an erect Hope, and how firm a Confidence should this raise in us? For since God has given us his own Son, *shall he not together with him freely give us all things?* Every Attribute of God is a firm Pledge of Favour and Beneficence to all his Creatures, for his very Essence is Love; and besides that, *his Mercy is over all his Works;* he has given his Promise, that he *will withhold no good thing from them who live a godly Life.* But then the Death of *Christ* has made our Title yet stronger to the best of all good things, the Pardon of Sin, the Grace of the Spirit, and the Glories of Heaven; *and who then or what shall separate us from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?* Are we griev'd and wearied with the Burden of our Sins, *we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous?* Let us therefore *take his Yoke upon us, for 'tis easy and light, and cast our Care upon him, for he careth for us.* Let
us

us, in one word, copy the Pattern of his Purity and Patience, and then we shall taste all the Fruits of his Passion in the Joys and Glories of his Kingdom.



IV. SERMON VI.



SERMON
HAVING dispatched the first Part of these Words, the Occasion calls upon me to enlarge upon this Point. I shall Power to take it down. A few words which contains indeed but few words.



S E R M O N VI.

The Resurrection of *Jesus Christ* the
Effect of his absolute Power.



JOHN X. 18.

*I have Power to lay it down, and I
have Power to take it again.*



HAVING dispatch'd the former Part of these Words, the Occasion calls upon me to enlarge upon this Clause, *I have Power to take it again.* A Paragraph which contains indeed but few Words,

Words, but is pregnant with a Sense, as wide and important as the Mystery and Miracle of this Day: I mean the rising of *Christ* from the Dead, and in virtue of that the Resurrection of all Mankind. We have seen in one Discourse the Spoil and Ravage of our last Enemy; but I am now to represent it so entirely baffled and destroy'd, that we may use the same holy Triumph with the Apostle, *O Death, where is thy Sting! O Grave, where is thy Victory!* If we saw but just now, the Son and Lamb of God, in order to take away the Sins of the World, sweating under the Pains, and groaning under the Scandal of the Cross, and wishing, so far as he was human, that the bitter Cup might *pass from him*; let us now take off our Eyes from *Golgotha*, and no longer seek *the Living among the Dead*: We are now enabled to say with the Angel that guarded his Tomb, *He is not here, but he is risen*. A short Interval, indeed! scarce of three Days, for so wonderful a Change to be wrought in; but so it was; for as *Christ* died purely to
destroy

110 SERMON VI.

destroy him who had the Power of Death, his time was now come to triumph over it, and he has made good in fact, what he so long since aver'd in the Words of the Text, that he had Power to take his Life again. In handling which Proposition, I shall confine myself to the following Branches of Discourse.

I. I shall fully evince that our blessed Lord possess'd an absolute and inherent Power to take his Life again.

II. I shall produce the clearest Proofs that he did exert this Power in raising himself from the Grave: And,

III. I shall shew what Influence the rising of *Christ* ought to have upon the Faith and Practice of all Christians. And,

I. In order to prove that our blessed Saviour was fully able to raise himself from the Dead, we need but consider him as a Being invested with an absolute unbounded Power, and then this Effect, as great and surprising as it may appear, will follow in the way of a most certain, easy, and natural Consequence: For a Power that can do all things, is equally

SERMON VI. 111

equally free from any Let or Hindrance in any thing it does. Now Power in general is nothing else but a Capacity of acting in Beings fram'd for that purpose; and it appears in greater or less degrees, according to the Measures imparted from God, the Source and Fountain of all Power. But still all deriv'd Power is finite and limited, suppose it to reach to the greatest Extent; and tho' the Power of an Angel may exceed, by never so great odds, that of a mere Man, yet neither does the one nor the other bear the least Proportion to Omnipotence; for God is infinitely rais'd above all Comparison: And because *all things are possible to him*, they are and must be equally so, abstracting from any regards of more or less. That our blessed Redeemer was really and truly God, I so far prov'd in my last Discourse, that we have in the present Case no more to do than to suppose him so, and then enquire what Bounds can be assign'd to the Actions of an infinite Being. It would indeed be a most stupid Absurdity to affirm that any can; and since
therefore

therefore the blessed *Jesus* has so often and fully asserted his own Godhead, declar'd *himself and his Father to be one*, and that they both *do the same Works*; what can there be in the Compass of Nature (and we may take in the Powers of Hell too, which may perhaps exceed it) that can either baffle or oppose a most perfect, because supreme and independent Power? If *Christ* be God, he is the God of Nature; for Nature is but the Work or Art of God. And a Power certainly, which is the Spring to all other Powers, gives Birth and Issue to every Cause, and guides the Movements of every Wheel in this great Machine, can never be check'd or controul'd by any thing that acts under it. Tho' therefore the *dividing the Waters of the Red Sea*, the sustaining so many Lives, and so long a time, *with Bread from Heaven*, or the revers'd Motion of the Sun on *the Dial of A-baz*, did really exceed the Force of any second Cause; they were as easy and pliant Events in the Hands of the First, as that a Stream should flow, that Food
should

SERMON VI. 113

should nourish, or that the Sun should shine: for sure 'tis but reasonable that Nature should obey in every thing the Command and Call of her Maker. Thus God can destroy the World as readily as he could make it, *and renew, as well as create, the Face of the Earth.* We now advance to the special Instance of *Christ's* raising himself from the Grave; can we conceive this to be an Act less possible to the Godhead that resided in him, than it was to assume, without Confusion, the Nature of Man into that of God, to impregnate the Womb of a Virgin, or furnish himself with a temporal Being either from no Cause, or from one the most unlikely to produce the Effect? But, to say Truth, there can be no Cause but what God has produced, and then they are oblig'd to serve him in his own way. So that may we here make the Apostle's Demand, *Why (of all things) should it seem impossible that God should raise the Dead?* 'Tis true, that as no mere Man can save his own or *Brother's* Life from the Grave, so has no Man quickned his own Soul:

But the Power that rais'd up *Jesus* was purely Divine, and there can be but two Suggestions offer'd, why *Christ* should not exert his Omnipotence in loosing the Pains of Death, either because the Act itself implied a Contradiction, or else was, in some respect or other, unworthy of the Attributes by which he was rais'd.

As for the former Pretence, 'tis entirely false and groundless. For tho' it be above the Reach of Reason, how a Body should be rais'd from the Dead, (and is it not so likewise, how Dust should be quickned into a living Soul.) Yet the thing does no way shock or contradict it; for when I affirm that *Christ* was dead, and is alive, I do by no means assert the same thing to be and not to be at the same time; but that a Body disjoin'd from the Soul that inform'd it, and stripp'd of some Qualities common to both, has receiv'd the same Properties again, or such as God shall please to allot it, when this *Corruption shall put on Incorruption*. Now this, I confess, is a very great and admirable Change, and so the Apostle styles

SERMON VI. 115

styles it; yet it contradicts nothing but the Folly and Boldness of those that dare dispute it; for it obtrudes not gross or absurd Tenets upon our Faiths but would only conduct us to a sort of second Creation, and that so much more obvious than the first, as 'tis to conceive a Being rais'd from the Dust, rather than fram'd from nothing.

But then neither does such an Event less become the Greatness or Goodness of God, than it any way opposes the Reason of the Thing. For as the Attributes of God are nothing else but the essential Rectitude of his Being, so must there needs be the most perfect Consent between 'em; and he therefore can do every thing, because he cannot will any thing but what is wise and holy, just and good. And if we apply this to the divine Power that rais'd up Jesus from the Dead, we shall find it conducted by the unerring Council of his Will, and the joint Consent of all his Attributes. If we appeal to his Wisdom, the Means and the End were most admirably suited, and Christ chose to wear the Nature,

116 SERMON VI

not of Angels, but of Men; that is one that he might live and die, and be restor'd in. And that we may as little doubt the Goodness of the Agent, the rising of *Christ* was to be a Pledge of Immortality to a whole Race of Beings redeem'd by his Death. Nor was his Truth less honour'd than his Mercy by this great Event: For God had foretold on his Son's behalf, that *his Soul should not be left in the Grave*: And the Son himself had declar'd, that if the *Jews destroy'd the Temple of his Body, he would raise it again in three Days*. And to shew how very fit and congruous it was that he should do so, how worthy of the divine Nature, that he should thus shew himself the Son of God with Power, he had given several Proofs before of the same kind; for the *Blind and Deaf* were not only cur'd, and *Devils* cast out, but the *Dead* rais'd to Life by him; and had he then not done in his own Case, what he was able and ready to do for *Lazarus* and others, it might have been retorted upon him to worse purpose than in the very Article

John 11:17 of

of his Sufferings, *He saved others, himself he can not save.* But to place this Matter beyond all Cavil, what God was so able and willing to perform, he has actually brought to pass; and we are no longer to enquire, how can these things be, but thankfully to acknowledge, that *Christ* is rais'd up by the Glory of the Father. And this carries me on to my

II. Head of Discourse, the evincing, by the clearest Proofs, that *Christ* did really exert this Power by raising himself (as this Day) from the Grave. In pursuance of this, I shall briefly shew the Nature and Quality of the Proofs, and then examine the Weight and Merit of 'em.

As for the Proofs of this Fact, they are so many and various, so great and important, so fully attested, and so long and firmly believ'd, that to doubt or dispute 'em would be to wink against the brightest Evidence. The first I shall mention is an Attestation immediately from Heaven; for that God might afford an Evidence at once proper to confound the Malice of *Christ's* Enemies, and support the Faith and Hopes of his Followers,

118 SERMON VI

an Angel was set *to watch the Sepulchre*, and relieve the pious Care and Concern of those that approach'd it; whilst, on the other side, the *Graves* were oblig'd in many Places to surrender *their Dead*; and in this, there was *so terrible an Earthquake, that the Keepers did shake, and become as dead Men*. But tho' this amounted to a strong and complicated Proof, yet so important an Event must not only have Heaven and Earth to vouch it, but him that was the Lord of both; and therefore our blessed Lord was pleas'd to appear, after his rising, in the very Shape and Person he so long wore, and was so well known by before he suffer'd: And that his Appearance might not pass for the Effect of a Surprise, or a mere Illusion of Fancy, he was seen not once, but often, not by single Persons or a few, but by great Numbers, and that not privately and in Corners, but in Places of the greatest Resort and Concourse: For besides his first Appearance to the two *Maries* soon after they left the Place of his Interment, he appear'd singly to *St. Peter* and

and St. James, convers'd and eat with
two Disciples in their way to Emmaus,
and saluted the Eleven together as they
sat at Meaⁿ with a, Peace be unto you.
But because some, after so many and
plain Discoveries, were slow of Heart
to believe, he was farther pleas'd to
convince their Senses by *showing them*
his Hands and his Side; nay after all
this, as if he design'd to baffle even the
Spirit of Sadducism, he was seen by
five hundred Brethren at once, the
greater Part of whom surviv'd many
of the Apostles, to which if we add,
that he seal'd their Commission after he
was risen, gave them *his own Presence*
forty Days together, and *ascended to Hea-*
ven in theirs. We can hardly establish
the Truth of this Event upon a surer
Foundation.

Unless perhaps it may tend to support
it, that these very Witnesses, as full of
Doubt and Scruple as they appear'd on
the first Surprize of these glad Tidings,
were now the most zealously forward to
proclaim and assert 'em, and that in the
Face of the Jewish Rulers and Gran-

dees. We have seen then who these Witnesses are, and how they agree together, and it will soon appear that the Miracle of this Day can neither want or receive a firmer or better Testimony: For if in all Matters of Fact we are to appeal to the Eyes or Ears of those, in whose Presence they happen'd; and in Things above Reason, are to expect no other than moral Evidence, that is, such Grounds of Proof as the Nature of the Thing will allow, and Men do and ought to admit in the like Cases, where can we meet with a Fact in any History that subsists on so many and proper, so full and convincing Proofs as the rising of *Christ*? For besides that the Event was too publick to be an Imposture, there was not one Circumstance relating to it, but what carried all the Marks of Truth and Credibility. The Angel certainly could not be suborn'd, nor the Earthquake conceal'd; and the Fact was too near the holy City to amuse or deceive so many Millions of People; nay the Matter itself was too important not to deserve the strictest Enquiry; and the

SERMON VI. 121

the Enemies of the Cross were too vigilant and officious not to make it: And since this great thing happen'd so very lately, that there was hardly time for it to pass from the Eye into the Memory, since the News of it was fresh in the Mouths, and the Impression strong and lively upon the Minds of so many, it must needs gain Belief as it pass'd, or at least drive Men's Attention to weigh the Evidence on which it stood. And because it did so, to the Shame and Regret of the Rulers and great Men that wish'd it untrue, they are forc'd to dictate this Lesson to the Soldiers employ'd by 'em, *Say ye his Disciples came by Night and stole him away*: A most wretched and senseless Shift, to forge an Untruth, which should so clearly contradict itself! But some thing must be done to stifle the Proof of so upbraiding a Fact; and what will not a large Bribe do upon a mercenary Conscience? The Watch therefore take the Money, and spread the Report, but it serv'd (as all Absurdities do) to give Credit and Lustre to the Truth it would have eclips'd:

eclips'd: For that which blinded the Eyes of a few Wretches hir'd to betray the Truth and themselves, open'd those of other Men, and the Disciples were now doubly concern'd to vindicate a Fact, confronted by so base and scandalous a Forgery: And so they did in the Temple and Synagogues, and that so much beyond all Reply from those who had Power to silence, if not refute em, that I may venture to close the Evidence of this great Fact with St. Peter's Challenge to the very Council of the Elders; *The God of our Fathers hath raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a Tree; and we are Witnesses of these things.* But I now advance from the Proof of this Event to consider,

III. The Uses that are to be made of it in reference both to our Faith and Practice.

First then, if *Christ* be risen indeed, our Faith can want no other Argument that the whole Christian Religion is true, at least so great a Miracle wrought by and upon its Author, and that from the
very

SERMON VI. 123

very Grave, must be a confirming Seal that *Christ* was really *the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God*. 'Tis true that his Works and Miracles, his Parables and Sermons, his Instructions and Precepts, and a Life of Goodness and Patience above Precedent or Imitation, did all shew that he came from Heaven: And they that refus'd to receive him by these genuine Marks, for the promis'd *Messias*, were certainly without Excuse. Yet still if we allow something for the Weakness of Reason, the Strength of Passion, the Frailty of Nature, and the Force of Prejudice, there might be some Plea offer'd at that time for any modest Doubt in regard to his Person and Offices. For that the Father and Son should be one God, that God and Man should unite in the Person of *Christ*, that the Gospel should bring to Light an immortal State, which Men before but barely and darkly guess'd at, and that the Passage to this State must be thorough the Gates of Death; in a word, that all Mankind must at the grand Summons rise from their Graves, and

and come to Judgment; this was startling News to Flesh and Blood; and therefore the divine Person that brought 'em produc'd his Credentials as soon as he enter'd on his Ministry, earn'd every Act of Faith, at the Expence of a Miracle, and both accepted and encouraged it in Proportion to the Proofs he gave of his Mission. But we have now a full and compleat Proof all the Truths of the Gospel in the Resurrection of its Author; nay we have all Proofs in one; for he that could raise himself from the Grave, could most certainly act the things which he did, prove the Truths he affirm'd, and make good whatever he threaten'd or promis'd, whilst he was alive: So that whatever may become of the *Sadducees* then, who could not digest the Notion of a Resurrection, a modern Deist will be so much the more an unpardonable Infidel, as he will not be persuaded, *tho' one, even Christ himself, has risen from the Dead.* But then,

A second Inference from this Doctrine for the Support of our Faith, and the
Encou-

SERMON VI. 125

Encouragement of our Piety; is this, that the rising of our blessed Lord is not only a Type and Emblem, but the very Pledge and Earnest of our own. For when he took our Nature, and adopted us into so blessed an Union, the Head and the Members were to enjoy one common Privilege; and the same Grace which made us the *Sons of God*, appointed us *Heirs of Glory*, and *Joint-Heirs with Christ*, but still every Man in his own Order. The Glory that awaits us is certain, but who shall enjoy it, and when it shall be confer'd, the Apostle instructs us in these Words, *Christ the First fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming*. And thus will the Parallel be made good between our first and last Representative; for *as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive*. And the Consequence from the one to the other is so necessary to our Happiness, that if it should fail, and our *Hope* were to terminate in *this Life*, we were of all Men the most miserable. But St. Paul has given us a much better Assurance, *for now is Christ risen,*

risen, and become the First-fruits of all that sleep. And since then we have so firm Grounds of Hope that we shall rise in and by *Christ* our Head and Surety, 'twere vain and sinful to perplex our Minds with the Manner and Philosophy of so mysterious a Change. But should they have so little Faith as to demand, with *St. Paul's* Querist, *How are the Dead raised up, and with what Body do they come?* If this Answer will not suffice, *Thou Fool!* that which thou *seest* is not quickned, except it die; let this for ever silence their Doubts, that the same Power which raised up *Jesus*, shall also quicken their mortal Bodies.

To conclude: Did *Christ* rise from the Dead to secure our Glory, as well as enter into his own, and was the Body he rose with a Pattern of that heavenly one we shall one Day receive, with what a pious Solicitude should we then look forward to this great and glorious Change! And what is there that should make us doat upon this *earthly Prison*, or be so willing to drag about a Carcass which is now the Sink of so much Corruption,

ruption, and shall anon become a Mor-
 sel for the Worms! *These vile Bodies*
shall be made like the glorious Body of
 our Lord and Saviour. Let us wait
 with Patience till these times of refresh-
 ing shall come from the Presence of
 the Lord. What tho' it does *not yet*
appear what we shall be, yet we are
 sure that we shall see our Redeemer
 Face to Face, and that *where he is, there*
shall we be also? Let us therefore look
 up to *Jesus*, the Author and Finisher of
 our Faith, and so endeavour to partake
 of his Death, that we may be made Par-
 takers of his Resurrection. This will be
 the best Test of our Hope, and the surest
 Pledge of our Happiness; for to sum
 up all with the most apposite Words of
 the Apostle, *If we be risen with Christ,*
 or firmly persuaded that we should be
 rais'd through him, we should *seek those*
things which are above, where Christ
sitteth at the Right Hand of God





SERMON VII.

God, the supreme and adequate
Object of our Love.

PSALM xviii. 1.

*I will love thee, O Lord, my
Strength!*

IT is hardly possible to express in so few Words a more affectionate Sense of Piety and Gratitude, and there could scarce have happen'd so critical an Occasion, wherein to exercise all the
devout

SERMON VII. 129

devout Affections of this good Prince. A great Part of his Reign was shar'd between severe Trials and signal Escapes: But as God knew, before he provid him, that he was a *Man after his own Heart*, so did he supply him with every Grace which might suit that Character. When he was pleas'd to visit him with any penal Afflictions, he endued him likewise with uncommon Degrees of Humility and Patience. When the same good Providence thought fit to fill his *Cup*, and to set his Feet in a Place of *Liberty*, we find his Mouth fill'd with Praise, and his Heart with Joy. But still his main Study was to frame his Temper and Deportment to the Design and Intention, rather than the Face and Appearance of God's Allotments. This indeed is the best Wisdom, as well as the truest Piety: For Blessings and Mercies may be convey'd by Frowns as well as Smiles, and the one or the other prove good or ill according to the different Use and Application. When God had sanctified the Sorrow, *David* found himself able to say, *thy Rod as well as thy*
K
Staff

Staff comfort me. And it was the same humble and resign'd Spirit which made him triumph in God, and not in the Wisdom or Strength of his own Arm or Counsels upon any Success or Advantage gain'd by him. It was a very great and eminent Deliverance to which we owe the penning of this Psalm; and as it well deserves the Title of a Song of Praise, so does the first Line afford us a compendious Form of Thanksgiving in these Words, *I will love thee, O Lord, my Strength!* In order to illustrate this Passage so as to promote the great Duty contain'd in it, I shall proceed to the following Considerations.

I. I shall endeavour to shew what the Love of God imports, from the most genuine Fruits and Characters which attend or follow it.

II. I shall make it appear that God is the supreme and adequate Object of this pious Affection: And,

III. I shall shew the particular Force of this Motive to engage our Love, that God is the entire Strength and Support of our Beings.

SERMON VII. 131

I. I am then to describe in the first Place, the Nature and Properties of that Duty which from the Object of it we may call divine Love; and I would chuse to call it so, in regard of its Eminence and Distinction, both in Kind and Degree, above the Aims or Appetites of our animal Nature. For besides that a sensual Love will afford too gross an Image of that heavenly Principle which unites the Soul to God, and makes it delight in him, there is no created Being can require or deserve a Love of Adherence; and therefore when we take too great a Complacency in any thing upon Earth, 'tis Dotage or Fondness, I might say Idolatry; for so is all Desire misplac'd; and we then certainly misplace it, when we love the Creature either more than the Creator, or otherwise than in, and for him. Divine Love then excludes any earthly Mixture or Alloy, looks directly to Heaven, and is a most express, vigorous, and formal Propension of the Mind towards God. And this *Moses* has assign'd as the first and most distinguishing Cha-

132 SERMON VII.

racter of this Love, that *we love the Lord with all our Heart and Mind and Strength*; i. e. not only above all other things, but so far exclusively of 'em, that we do not desire 'em for themselves, but that Use only to which God has been pleas'd to assign 'em. Now if this Affection must be employ'd so entirely upon its Object as to exclude any Mixture or Rivalry, it will readily follow, that a Being who requires such a degree of Love, will expect that it should exert itself in those most natural Fruits of Submission and Acquiescence, Imitation and Conformity, and a most ardent and incessant Desire of Union and Enjoyment.

As to the Point of Resignation, there is hardly any degree of Love can subsist without it: For all Opposition implies Hostility; and that Affection which knows not how to yield and comply, is but at a small Remove from Enmity and Hatred. We cannot form any Idea of human Friendships, but we must conceive at the same time such an Union of Wills, that what the one likes or dislikes,

SERMON VII. 133

dislikes, the other shall approve or reject in the same degree: So that Minds that are join'd by this Bond, act by perfect Sympathy and Consent, and like an Union in Music, repeat, as it were, the same Sound to one another; or if they have not the same Choices and Aversations, (because every thing that is finite is subject to Error;) yet where they cannot comply, they wish they could, and are sorry for the Impediment. But if a mix'd, drossy and imperfect Love is so ready to go out of itself, to bear and forbear, to yield up its Claims and Pretensions, and pass entirely into the Will and Sentiments of what it loves; let us change but the Object, and place the Affection upon God, and it must needs carry with it the fullest Trust and Affiance, a most ready Submission to all his Appointments, and a chearful Passiveness under all Events; for the Will of God being the only true and certain Standard of what is fit or unfit, we should have no Choices of our own, but resolve every Wish and Desire into the Counsel of it. Nor can we afford

134 SERMON VII.

the least Proof of our Love to God, when we oppose or dislike his Choices for us, or would desire to have any thing chang'd or remov'd which God has order'd ; for Love is stronger even than Death itself : And our blessed Lord, who could have declin'd it, yet chose, upon the pure Motives of Duty and Affection, to drink the bitterest Cup that ever was mingled. There is something very excellent in this Form of Submission, *Not my Will, O Lord, but thine be done.* And tho' our Frailties will not allow us to equal so great a Pattern in the Act of Suffering, yet a true filial Affection to our heavenly Father, will inspire our Hearts with the same Disposition, and our Tongues with the same Language, and make us ready at least *to will and to do according to his good Pleasure.*

For this will be a farther Proof and very genuine Mark of this prevailing Principle, when we are prepar'd to obey God in every thing, to execute his Laws without Scruple or Reserve, and to transcribe 'em into our Lives and Consci.

Consciences. Now God has enjoin'd us no Commands, but what are Transcripts of that Truth and Holiness, Charity and Justice, by which he becomes a Law to himself; and the Sum of all Religion lies in that Command, which bids us be holy and perfect as God is: So that the Obedience of Christians is not a blind Compliance with an arbitrary Will, but a wise and free Imitation of a most excellent Pattern, a just Conformity to an eternal, and therefore immutable Law of Righteousness. But is it possible to love God, who is the *Way and the Truth*, the first and only Rule of Perfection, and yet decline the Practice of those Duties which can alone transform us into his Image? And is not every Sin an Act of Hatred, as it implies a Breach of God's Law, and Enmity to his Nature, unless it were possible for us to be Friends and Enemies at the same time? We find that Men are but too apt to obey the Commands, and even imitate the Vices of those they love: But then, if a Love so ill founded is so very obsequious, shall not a Principle,

that is so much better directed, most cheerfully perform what God requires, since he cannot require any thing but what is just and good. Our Saviour had just reason to demand this Test, *If ye love me, keep my Commandments*. For since they are not grievous, and his Service so reasonable, we must either not love our selves, or afford this Sign of our Love to God, to observe those Rules, without which we can neither recover the Image we were born after, nor attain the Blessedness we were fram'd for. Now since this can never be full and compleat, till we arrive at a State of Union and Enjoyment.

The Desire of this State will be another good Proof, that the Love of God reigns in our Hearts, and the more ardent this Desire is, the better will it discover this holy Affection. Whatever Ways therefore God shall chuse to communicate himself to us, now or hereafter, whether by the Influx and Irradiations of his Spirit in Prayers, Praises and devout Meditations, or by the Returns and Answers of a good Conscience; in
the

SERMON VII. 137

the same degree we love God, we shall long after this blessed Communion, and rejoice in it; we shall desire that God may dwell in us, and we in him, and regard this divine Presence as the Life and Light of our Spirits. To this Height of Desire was the Psalmist's Love inflam'd, that as *the Heart panted after the Springs of Water*, so did his Soul *thirst after God*. And as this Thirst must needs be greater as it approaches those *Rivers of Pleasure at God's Right Hand*, so we find St. Paul wishing to be *dissolv'd, that he might be with Christ*: Nor can any one be made perfect in Love, who does not incessantly breath after the last and utmost Fruition of the supreme Good; and that, in other Words, is the perfect and most desirable Union between God and the Soul. But I pass from this short Description of the Love of God to make it appear under my

II. Head of Reflection, that God is the supreme and adequate Object of this pious Affection. To render him in all respects the most worthy of it, we need
but

but contemplate this amiable Being in his Essence or his Providence, in himself or in relation to his Creatures.

As to the Perfections of the divine Nature, tho' consider'd apart and by way of Abstraction, they excite a silent and devout Wonder, as the first Sentiment, (for who can think of a simple and self-depending Cause without it?) yet as these Attributes expand and open into others that flow from them, and are necessary to a Being who exists of himself, (and such are Power, Goodness, and Truth) they become the Objects of Love and Endearment; for they lay before us the original Draught of all Order and Harmony, as well as Beauty and Perfection; that which attracts our Love and Desire here below, the Wisdom or Virtue of the purest Mind, the Lines or Features of the exactest Face, the Form, or Beauty, the Use or Excellence of any created thing, is but a dark Shadow of that uncreated Light and Brightness, God himself. And whilst our Love is thus forcibly carried out towards the Works of God, however we may exceed in the Measure,

Measure, we own, before we are aware, that God is lovely in his Works, and so much more lovely, as the Cause is than the Effect it produces. But now God having in himself the Ideas of all things that either are or can be, he must be infinitely lovely, if any Creature can be so, in the least and lowest Degree. 'Tis this great Plan of Perfection that the holy Angels study and contemplate, love and adore, praise and worship Day and Night: And tho' we cannot reach the Ardours of the Seraphim, because we do not yet see God as he is, yet we know him so far, as to pronounce with *David*, that *there is none in Heaven or Earth to be desir'd in Comparison of him*. At least if we desire to love him, as we ought, we need but enquire with another Prophet, *How great is his Goodness, and how great is his Beauty!*

But this adorable Being will yet command our best and humblest Affections, when set in a relative View, and consider'd out of himself, in the Issues of that Fulness whereof we are Partakers. 'Tis a most affecting Image the Royal Prophet

phet has given us in the shortest Compass, *Thou art good, and thou doest good!* And the latter Clause, however it may spring from the first, will ever have a double Influence upon human Affections; for 'tis so natural to love our selves, that what we can spare of this Propension, will lean towards that from which we receive or hope for the most Good: So that let a Being be never so excellent in itself, it will command our Love and Esteem in such a Proportion, as it can and will promote the Interest and Welfare of our Beings: And God is so full and flowing a Fountain of Goodness to all his Creatures, that those who love him lack nothing. It was a very noble, and (in respect of us) the first Discovery of the Plenty and Exuberance of this great Attribute, the giving Man a Being, and other Creatures too in a great measure for his sake. God was equally, because fully happy in himself, before this Product of his Bounty and Goodness; so that the only End of making Man was undoubtedly to make him happy; and a large Step it was to-
wards

wards this Happiness, (had it been well pursued) that God created Man in his own Image, that he made him wise and upright, gave him an Heart void of Corruption, and a Mind free from Error or Ignorance. Thus was he furnish'd within, and wanted no Power whereby he might know, worship, and converse with, and how then could he but love and adore his Maker! But Man was a Compound of Body as well as Spirit; and the same Goodness which infus'd into him *the Breath of Life*, made likewise the most plentiful Provision not only to sustain, but to make it easy and comfortable. He found a World ready stock'd with Objects to divert, Herbs, Fruits, and Plants, with the entire Granary of Nature to feed and nourish, Beasts and Cattle to cloath and do him Homage, a Sun to warm, the Air to refresh him, and in a word, the Returns of Day and Night to afford him the double Pleasure of Indolence and Action; and if this had been too little, would not God have given him likewise the Tree of Life that he might taste and eat, and live

142 SERMON VII.

live for ever? But alas! Man would not be so happy as God design'd him, but broke his Command, and brought Death upon himself and his whole Race. But the *Mercies of God are over all his Works*; and to shew what Claim they have to our Love and Gratitude, they pursued and took hold of a Creature who was flying from them, appeas'd the Guilt of his Transgression by the Promise of a Saviour, and aton'd it by the Death of his own Son in our Nature. And since God has so richly abounded in Blessings to us, has given us so many and so good Gifts, those of his Left Hand, Food and Raiment, Health and Liberty, and has not deny'd us those of his Right, the Ministry of Reconciliation, the Pardon of Sin, the Peace of God, and the Aid and Earnest of the Holy Spirit; we have abundant reason to join in the Apostle's Conclusion, *We love him, because he first loved us*. And to give it the greater Force, I shall more particularly shew in the

III. Place, The Tendency of this Motive to engage our Love, that God is

the

SERMON VII. 143

the entire Strength and Support of our Beings. To this Purpose I consider,

I. That God is in so full and absolute a Sense our Prop and Stay, that as we could never have been but by and through him, so must we cease to be without him. There was a time when we existed only in the Mind of our Maker, and had not his Hand form'd, and his Voice call'd us into Being, as mere Nothings, we could have no Power or Tendency towards it; so that if we are to bless God for his Goodness, in bestowing Life upon us, we are to love and adore him for that Power, by which Dust and Clay was so contemper'd, that *Man became a living Soul*. And tho' the smallest Insect, or the vilest Reptile speaks the Power of the divine Artist, as well as the most glorious Structure of Angels or Men, yet Man has receiv'd better Supplies from the Hand of Providence for his Safety and Defence, than all the Creatures besides. But still these are but borrow'd Succours, and our Life and Strength does not only come from God, but subsist by him; and e-

very

very Man has reason to profess with the same Spirit *David* did, *through thee have I been holden up ever since I was born.* Creation and Providence are not so much two distinct Acts of Power, as the same Miracle continued and repeated from one Age to another: Neither can Man or any Creature above him, any more preserve themselves in Being, than they could exist at first by their own Power: 'Tis wholly *in God that we live and move*; and when he withdraws the Breath that sustains us, *we turn again to our Dust.* Indeed the Seeds of Corruption are planted in our Nature, and a mortal Body must at one time or other fall asunder; but this is not all, there does not want so large a Catalogue of Diseases to destroy us; for every Accident, and every Creature and Element can do it: So that the Reserves and Escapes we enjoy every Minute, from the Throng of Dangers we are encompass'd with, carry the Face of a renew'd Creation, and must remind us, if we are not stupid, to look up to the Rock of our Defence, and cry

cry out, in a grateful Extasy, *I will love thee, O Lord, my Strength!* But if God be the Support of our Being, so is he

2. Of our Wellbeing too. We are taught that Man has a Spirit to be preserv'd, as well as a Soul and Body: A Spirit in the most exalted Sense; an inward Man, which is the Seat of Grace, as that is the Source of a new and better Life. Now the Aid and Conduct of this divine Principle is so requisite to all the Functions of this spiritual Life, to the beginning and Progress of our regenerate State, that *unless we are strengthened by this blessed Spirit in the inward Man, we can neither be born anew, nor grow in Grace, nor become perfect Men in Christ Jesus.* In respect either of the Will or Power to shun the Evil, and do the Good, we are as frail as Impotence itself; nor do we own a good Thought but what God inspires, for *all our Sufficiency is from him:* And tho' he can make his own *Strength perfect in our Weakness*, yet it is his Strength still, and without it we must sink under our Sins and Sorrows both. For were

L

not

146 SERMON VII.

not God so gracious to *Speak Comfort to the Afflicted*, and not to *bruise the broken Reed, a wounded Spirit, who could bear?* Or could any Man stand in *thy Sight*, O God, *when thou art angry?* So that here too God is our sole Rock and Shelter; and helpless shall we be, unless he vouchsafes likewise to be our Guide unto Death.

Once more: God is our entire Strength and Support, as we depend on him for the Change of this frail State into a better, for a most happy Translation, in God's good time, from *this Vale of Tears, to a City not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens*. Whatever this State is, (for it does not yet appear what we shall be) 'tis all Grace and Privilege, the free Effect of God's Goodness and Power; for as he only has Immortality, so he alone can bestow it; and that he does not plunge us into nothing, but *will raise us up at the last Day*; that he will *change our vile Bodies* into glorious ones, and so improve our Spirits, that they shall know, and love, and enjoy him for ever; For thus are we to
praise,

SERMON VII. 147

praise, worship, and adore him *in all Churches of the Saints*; and therefore to this blessed and *only Potentate, the Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords, be Honour and Power Everlasting. Amen.*



L²

SERMON



S E R M O N VIII.

The Sin and Mischief of immoderate Anger, exemplified in the Instance of *Jonah*.



JONAH iv. 4.

Then said the Lord, Doeſt thou well to be angry?



IF we conſider the Number and Violence, the eager and the oppoſite Motions of our Paſſions and Deſires, Mankind muſt needs appear a ſtrange Compound: Not purely as he wears a Mind capable

S E R M O N VIII. 149

capable of these Sentiments; for since they are wrought up and blended with his very Frame, they may be so order'd, as to become the Matter of Virtue, and the Foundation of Reward: But they are then both a Burthen and a Blemish to us, when we allow 'em to seize the Reins, and wrest the Government out of the Hands of Reason. Under the Conduct of this Sovereign, they might most certainly be very useful Sentiments; but we cannot conceive a more frightful Anarchy, than the Lusts and Passions of Men let loose, for they will all be Tyrants in their turns; and whether Fear or Grief, Rage or Anger, Love or Hate have usurp'd the Dominion, the Soul does at best but shift her Vassalage, if she be not a Slave to all these bad Masters at once. The last may certainly happen, where our Desires or Affections are misplac'd; for as Joy and Acquiescence follow the Possession of any Good we have set our Hearts upon, so whenever they are disappointed, Anger generally makes the first Sally: For 'tis a Sentiment which Pride and Self-love

150 SERMON VIII.

are very ready to awake in us, when any thing runs cross to the Stream of our Wishes and Desires; and we have in this Chapter an Instance of a Prophet who shew'd himself in the present Case *a Man of like Passions with us*; for he was angry, greatly angry (as the Margin expresses it) at an Event which should rather have been the Subject of his Thanks and Praise. The Mercies of God, and the Repentance of an almost devoted People were Causes great enough to excite Joy in the Presence of the Angels: But the Prophet appear'd, at that Instant at least, to regard more the Credit of his Character, than the Glory of God's Patience. He had denounc'd Destruction upon the City of *Nineveh*, and the fear of being thought a false Prophet, after God thought fit to convert and spare it, extorted from him this plain Confession of his human Frailty, *It is better for me to die than to live*. Upon which he is made to receive this very mild Answer as the best Reproof of his intemperate Warmth; *Then said the Lord, Dost thou well to be angry?* I

shall

shall consider the Words under the following Method.

I. I shall briefly shew the Nature of Anger, and in what Degree or Instance it becomes faulty and criminal.

II. I shall discover the great Sin and Mischief of this Passion, when not duly restrain'd: And,

III. I shall propose some Rules for the better avoiding any faulty Excesses of this kind.

I. To begin with the first: Anger then, consider'd as an Affection of the Mind, is nothing but a warm and lively Effort upon the Approach of something it does not like. Whatever excites it, must at least be conceiv'd as displeasing and offensive: And tho' Men are too often angry without a Cause, as well as out of Measure, yet it must be something Evil in Appearance at least which can cost the Mind so sudden a Disorder. Now till this becomes an Habit, which will be sooner or later, according to the Force of Custom, or the Influence of Temper and Complexion, there is no Motion of the Soul that

152 SERMON VIII.

passes more nimbly, or leaves fainter Impressions behind; and that which makes it criminal, is, when it passes from a short and natural Resentment into a slower and more settled Spirit, and Principle, as it were, of Rage and Bitterness. If we then regard Anger as a Sentiment which springs from a Root within us, 'tis no farther nor otherwise faulty than that Nature is which makes us liable to it; so that the whole of our Duty will be to curb and restrain, what we find out of our Power to abandon or extinguish. Thought in general is the Motion of the Soul, and the Passions are but various Motions rais'd in us according to the Difference of Objects and Occasions. For this reason they have been styl'd the Wings of the Soul; and Anger hath as good a Title to exert itself, within due Bounds, as any other Affection. So that we must either be oblig'd not to love what is amiable, or fear what is dreadful, or hate what is evil; or we shall be allowed for the same Reason, to employ this Sentiment in the right Place, and upon just Motives.

SERMON VIII. 153

tives. The Apostle has allow'd the thing, under a due Restraint, in this short Caution, *Be ye angry, and sin not*: And *Christ* himself pointed out the Occasion, and justify'd the Act, in the pious Resentment express'd by him, when he found *the House of God* degraded into an *House of Merchandise*. In such a Case not to have been angry, must have look'd like Stupidity or Connivance: Nor can we in truth afford a better Name than the first of these to the boasted Apathy of the Stoicks; for either their want of feeling was a mere Rant, or else in pretending to be above other Men, they sunk below 'em into Stocks and Stones. But there is no occasion, or even Possibility that the Soul of Man should be like a dead Sea, without Spring or Motion; 'tis enough that 'tis clear of any Storm or Tempest, which may sink Reason, or shipwreck Virtue. Thus far Anger may be innocent, as she has the Voice of Nature to bear her out; but the least Step beyond these Bounds is dark and dangerous, and we may even here affirm, that whatsoever is more
than

than this cometh of Evil; so that in Consequence, this Affection will commence sinful, when 'tis irregular in respect of the Object, the Measure, or Duration of it.

Now as to the Occasion, a slight or trivial one can neither require nor deserve the Notice of our Resentment; so that when Men's Tempers take fire at little Disasters and common Accidents; when they grow angry with things that ought to be, because God does not think fit to remove 'em; and much more at Events which are good in themselves, and therefore can disgust none that love God and Goodness; they quarrel with and sin against Providence, and 'tis a Wrong likewise to their Neighbour and themselves, when their Choler is raised upon the smallest Trifles, the casual Omissions of Form or Respect, upon a word misplac'd or misunderstood, or an Action heighten'd by another's Malice, or caus'd perhaps by their own Indiscretion. In these Cases, which are as common as Anger itself, one Passion seems to retain to another; and Pride perhaps

SERMON VIII. 155

perhaps or Hatred are then blowing one another into a Flame, without the least Motive or Provocation from without. But 'tis certainly a very ill Account Men give of themselves, that they are ruffled and discompos'd with any thing or nothing, that Passion rises in 'em like a Gust of Wind, and that they know as little whence it cometh, as whither it goeth.

But this bad State of Mind does still become worse, when the Storm is not only rais'd upon small Occasions or none at all, but grows so loud and boisterous, that no Charm, not even that of a *soft Answer*, can lay or appease it. When a Mans Wrath becomes thus boiling and furious, 'tis a certain Sign of a savage Nature, or a weak Judgment, and speaks the Head or the Heart to be much out of order: For as few things demand these keener Marks of our Regret, so when they appear in any great Excess, and out of all due Proportion to the different Incidents of Times, Things and Persons, they become indecent as well as sinful, and whereas a short and sudden

156 SERMON VIII.

den Sally of Passion may be excus'd by the Force of Surprize, or the Heat of Temper, the Encrease or Excess of it can admit of no Plea; for he that takes time to consider whether he shall lay down his Anger or no, is his own Tempter, and enters upon a very dangerous Consultation.

ii Besides, when the Mind is thus far exulcerated, as not to be sweetned by the fairest Applications of Reason or Argument, it is but at one Remove from a fix'd and permanent Habit of Anger, which constitutes the worst and most wretched State of Mind we can think of. Indeed Anger is too brisk and vigorous a Passion to be long in Action together; and as it makes a dismal Havock where it so happens, so if it be not quell'd and laid aside upon the first Effort; if it be allow'd to slumber a while, and then awake and gather fresh Recruits; it is then the most dangerous Guest the Breast can harbour. And this indeed were enough to expose the Badness of this Quality, in reference to any Object it may chuse to exercise itself

SERMON VIII. 157

self upon, that rather than grow mild and peaceable towards others, it will live upon the Prospect of that Mischief it would, but cannot execute at present. And this is a Reflection which leads me to consider more particularly under my

II. Head, The great Sin and Mischief of indulging this wild and headstrong Passion. And to make this appear, it may be enough to represent it as opposite to Piety, Charity, and Temperance, and so vacating at once every Duty we owe to God, our Neighbour, and our selves.

In respect of Piety, Anger is so directly contrary to it, both in the Act and Habit, that Light and Darkness cannot be more so: For the Love of God is a Spirit of Meekness and Peace, and all the Duties we pay him upon this Principle (and they are else but mere Hypocrisy) are calm in themselves, and require a Breast serene and undisturb'd. To think of God or his Attributes, under the least Disorder of Passion, is the highest Irreverence, and (allowing for the infinite Distance between God and Man)

158 SERMON VIII

Man) is like the approaching of a Prince under the Disguise of a Phrensy. And because Prayer is one of the most solemn Acts of Homage to God, the Apostle qualifies it by Meekness as well as Sanctity and Affiance; for he bids us lift up *holy Hands without Wrath or Doubting*. Indeed he that prays in Anger has great reason to doubt, or rather to be sure that his Prayers shall not be heard; for he offers *this Sacrifice with a wicked Mind*; and then the Wise Man tells us 'tis a double *Abomination*. However a Spirit of Rage and Fury is so contrary to that blessed Character the Scriptures give us of the divine Nature, that if our Persons or Services shall be so far only accepted, as we endeavour to be like him, and act in Conformity to his Nature and Will, the angry or contentious Man can never please God now, or enjoy him hereafter: For the God we serve is mild and patient, *slow to Anger, and of great Mercy*; and tho' *his Compassions fail not*, yet his *Wrath endureth but the twinkling of an Eye*. Now as this is a very amiable Picture,

how

SERMON VIII. 159

how monstrously odious must that Rage or Rancour be which is the exact Reverse of it in every Feature? But then the Will of God is a Transcript of his Nature; and as that is describ'd so abundant in Mercy and Mildness, so the Gospel which was given for this End, chiefly to restore Man to the Image of God, attempts it chiefly by purging his Mind of the old Leaven of Malice and Bitterness. Thus our blessed Lawgiver himself has pronounc'd that Person *in danger of the Judgment, who is angry with his Brother without a Cause*; and St. Paul has join'd *Wrath and Anger with Malice and Evil-speaking*, as if on purpose to deter us from a Sin so hateful to God, and pregnant with Mischief.

For to proceed: This wrathful Temper is yet more culpable, as it destroys all the milder Propensions of Charity and Benevolence. When this Fire is once kindled, it wastes and burns without Distinction; and as it knows no Friend, it knows still less how to spare or pity its Enemy. Well might therefore

fore the Wise Man affirm, that *Anger is outrageous*; for it, bursts like an Earthquake, and does as much Execution; the longer 'tis conceal'd the more merciless it grows; and that which was but a petty Disgust in the first Conception, by the help of a bad Nature, and any new Incitements, spreads into Malice, and ends in Revenge. So vindictive a thing is Rage, in the Effect and Consequence, that there seems to be but little difference between that and Cruelty, except what mere Accident may throw in the way: So that when this *Lust is conceiv'd*, it will in the most literal Sense *bring forth Death*. 'Twas therefore a very excellent as well as early Precept of the Levitical Law, *Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thy Heart*: For Anger once lodg'd there, will soon find its way to the Tongue and the Hand, and shew itself in all the Forms of Outrage and Hostility. When *Shimei* grew heartily incens'd against *David*, the evil Spirit, we find, made him curse as he went: And *Jacob*, even whilst he is dividing a Blessing, reproves

two

SERMON VIII. 161

two of his Sons, because *in the Fierceness of their Anger they slew a Man*. What Slaughters and even Massacres have not follow'd from the Dictates of this rash, savage, and implacable Spirit? How many Friends and Families has it divided or destroy'd? How many Kingdoms wasted, and what *defenced Cities has it laid in ruinous Heaps*? Were we to reckon up the publick Wars and Battels, or the private Fewds and Quarrels, which have help'd to impair the World, from the beginning of it to this Day; we may see in this one Passion the Source of all these Evils; and 'tis purely owing to God's restraining Arm that the same Violence which has so long polluted the Earth, has not by this time well-nigh unpeopled it.

But there is something to be yet added to the Badness of this Quality, which appears so ill already, that it quite untunes the Harmony of the Soul, and sets a Man at Variance with himself, as well as with every thing almost that stands in his way. So far is it from being possible that an angry Man (as such) should

M

be

be a good Man, that he is scarce a Man: At least paint him in a Fit of Rage and Passion, under the common Effects and Influence of this Disorder, wild Looks, threatening Gestures, and brutish Actions, and you would wonder what was become of his Reason, or to what Enchantment one must impute so unaccountable a Change: A Change so great, that during this unhappy Paroxysm a Man is entirely absent from himself, and the Soul strip'd of the very Power of attending the Voice of Reason from others, or using its own to any purpose. A wise Man could hardly take a severer Revenge upon a warm and weak Adversary than to engage him in Reasoning, whilst his Rage was upon him: For, besides that it always spoils the Argument, it very often speaks the Man, and is enough, without any other Proof, to make good the Wise Man's Aphorism, *that Anger resteth in the Bosom of Fools*. And since therefore 'tis so great a Mischief in itself, and does so much, wherever 'tis allow'd to exceed its Limits, it is a Matter of as much Concernment
to

SERMON VIII. 163

to give Check to so fatal an Intemperance, as 'tis to preserve our Reason sound, our Credit safe, our Quiet undisturb'd, and our Souls themselves out of danger: For to dispatch this Head with the same Authority but now quoted, *He that hath no Rule over his Spirit, is like a City broken down and without Walls.* But it is time to offer some Remedy to so prevailing a Disease, and this I presume to do in the

III. And last Place, under the following short and practical Instructions.

1. That we would carefully watch the first Spring and Rise of these uneasy Motions, and not sooth and humour a Passion, which will not allow Reason a fair Hearing. If we do not oppose this Spirit, whilst 'tis stirring in the Blood, or mounting into the Face, it may happen to be too late; for there is a strange Emphasis in Looks, and the Tongue need not betray so obvious a Disorder. That our Passion therefore may neither outrun our Reason nor Virtue, it must be stopp'd in the very first Career. There is hardly any Temper so well

164 SERMON VIII.

mix'd, but has an over Allay of this bad Ferment : But some Spirits are so very fiery, that the smallest Breath will blow 'em into a Flame ; and 'tis of singular Use for every Person to know himself so well upon this Head, as to be able to stand Proof against those little Shocks and Alarms which discompose the Breasts of so many. Are we easy to be mov'd, and our Minds liable to a too forward, or too nice and tender a Resentment ; we should guard 'em the more closely, and harden and prepare 'em by Severity and Discipline ? To be vex'd and angry at small Things, and sour'd at every cross Appearance, is an Argument of Softness and Indulgence ; it shews that we know the World little, and our selves less, when we cannot bear the least Rub in our way, or will be put out of humour (with the Prophet in the Text) if the Sun over-warms us, or *wITHERS the Gourd* which gave us shelter. But 'tis too often that Rage and Fury spring from a yet deeper Source. Our Hearts are proud or envious, cruel or covetous, and then 'twill be easy to find a Ground

of

SERMON VIII. 165

of Quarrel, if *Mordecai* has a bigger Interest, or *Naboth* a better Vineyard, or any Man more Money, Credit or Respect, than our selves. These are so many great *Diana's*, and their Votaries worship them so heartily, that they grow sick and fullen, angry and froward, whenever their Hopes or Petitions return empty of that little Convenience, whatever it be, that their Vices want, or their Vanity aims at. Now if these be the too common Grounds of Men's Impatience and Resentment, not that they are ill treated or insulted by others, or have any real Motives to stir their Choler, or disconcert their Thoughts, but that they feed within a Principle of Unquietness, the true and only way to be easy will be to govern our selves better, and let Fancy and Passion restore to Reason what they have usurp'd from her. And we shall the sooner do this piece of Justice, if in the

2. Place, we reflect well and often upon the Beauty and Comeliness, as well as many other Advantages of a meek, gentle, and enduring Spirit. There is

STOPS

M 3

nothing

166 SERMON VIII.

nothing will furnish us with a juster Idea of any two Opposites, than to set 'em in a full Light, and near one another. And as Good and Evil are to be consider'd with this View only, that we may the better dispose our selves to pursue the one and avoid the other; so it being likewise very natural to fall into the Practice of what we esteem and approve, the more Instances we meet with of a calm, even, and dispassionate Spirit, the more shall we be asham'd of, and for that reason the sooner discard those ungrateful and captious Qualities of Anger and Frowardness. 'Tis easy to discern that the mild and placable, the gentle and forbearing command Value and Respect; and have no Enemies, but such as are the avow'd ones of all Virtue and Goodness. They are indeed a publick Blessing; and 'tis by their Means that Peace and Charity thrive and subsist: Whereas Anger is a common Nuisance; and 'tis so natural to *the wrathful to stir up Strife*, that 'tis well God has set Bounds to his Power, since his Malice and Fury knows none. But if we set
before

SERMON VIII. 167

before us the Copy I have nam'd, we cannot certainly want an Ambition to become Masters of a meek and quiet Spirit, since 'tis not only a very rich *Ornament* in itself, but *in the Sight of God of great Price*. But,

To conclude: If we still find a Prone-ness in our selves to this boisterous and unfriendly Passion; where can we discharge it with more Justice, or with better Effect, than upon our selves? I mean upon those Vices and Corruptions which have done us so much Damage and Disgrace, and are therefore the proper Objects of a most rational Indignation. We vent our Choler and waste our Resentments upon the little Errors and Follies of others (nay we rather spare the Vice and are angry at the Man) when our own Hearts demand all our Reproofs, and there is Naughtiness enough at home to employ all the Sentiments of Grief, Shame, and Indignation. This would be a suitable sort of Revenge, and the more likely to do good, because we know our own Faults, and shall learn from 'em how much need we have of

168 SERMON VIII.

Mercy and Pity. Let us then examine and chastise our own Faults first, and then we shall either have very little Repentment to spare, or we shall mix it with so much Compassion as is due to the Frailties of a Nature common to us all; for if *with the same Measure we meet, it shall be measur'd to us again*, there can need no other reason why we should flee from Wrath, and let go Displeasure, than that *the Wrath of God is a consuming Fire*.



SERMON

170 SERMON IX.

divers manners to manifest himself to World, that he vouchsaf'd *to speak in times past, by Dreams and Visions, to the Patriarchs and Prophets, and to us in these last Days by his own Son*: In a word, since the World is retriev'd from the Darkneſs and Discipline of Types and Figures into a moſt bright and glorious Revelation, that bleſſed Goſpel I mean, *which has brought Life and Immortality to Light*; we cannot but diſcern a moſt admirable Concurrence not only of the whole Trinity, but of all the Attributes of each Perſon in bringing about the great Affair of Man's Redemption. And as this ſhould teach us to ſet the higheſt Value upon ſo full and gracious a Diſcovery, ſo ſhould it inſpire us to love, adore and imitate the Meſſenger of theſe glad Tidings. It was no ſmall Argument of the Perverſeneſs and Incredulity of the *Jews*, that when our Saviour convers'd among 'em, and did all thoſe Things, and had all thoſe Characters meeting in him, by which their *Meſſias* was to be known, they yet refus'd to believe on him. Up-
on

on this very Score we find him reduc'd in this Chapter to make good the Truth and Credit of his Mission by several Appeals, the Force of which they could not evade. At the seventeenth Verse he refers himself to the *Testimony of his Father*; at the thirty second he borrows another Evidence *from John the Baptist*; and then having quoted his Miracles, which were Arguments address'd to their Eyes and Senses, he had no more to do than to appeal to their Conscience in citing those Writings which they own'd for the Rule of that, as well as the Standard of their Belief: And this he very roundly does in the Words I'm now repeating, *Search the Scriptures, for in them, &c.* In speaking to which Words I shall distinctly consider the following Particulars.

I. I shall very briefly shew what those Scriptures are, to the Search of which our Saviour refers in this Place.

II. I shall examine the Nature and Force of that Evidence they afford of a *Messias*, and thro' him, of a Life eternal: And,

III. I

b. III. I shall more largely apply this Duty to the Christian Revelation, and the Benefits which result from it.

b. II. And first: 'Tis very evident from the Subject and the Persons our blessed Lord was engag'd with in this Chapter, that the Scriptures he appeals to were the Writings of the Old Testament, or those several Books, whether of Precept, History, or Prophecy, which *Ezra* had revis'd after the great Captivity, and which the Body of the *Jewish* Church admitted within their Canon. As for the New Testament, it was but just promulg'd, and besides that it could not possibly be put into Writing, till the entire Contents of it had pass'd thro' the Hands as well as Lips of *Christ* and his Apostles. Our blessed Lord, by barely quoting his own Sermons or Miracles, had *born witness to himself*; a sort of Testimony he as often disavow'd, as his Enemies had the Confidence or Malice to charge him with it. He was now disputing with the *Jews*, Men that boasted much of the Law, and that *they had Abraham to their Father*; and therefore the most likely

I. III.

SERMON IX. . 173

likely way to confound as well as convince Men of so flow a Belief, was to refer 'em to Writings or Traditions own'd and avow'd by 'emselves. These are styl'd in the Text, *the Scriptures* in general; but in other Places, and sometimes on the same Occasion, *the Law and the Prophets*; as in the Close of this Chapter *Moses* is put for the Books under his Name, and *Moses and the Prophets* very often us'd for the Sum and Substance of the Old Testament. And indeed, tho' the Book of Psalms and some others, which do not properly fall within this List, afford some faint Glimpses, as to the Person, the Offices, and Kingdom of *Christ*; yet are the Rites and Types of *Moses* a more perfect *Schoolmaster to lead us* to him, and the Predictions of the Prophets much surer Marks to know him by, than any thing to be found in the History or Morals of that OEconomy. And therefore when *Christ* was so often and clearly foretold by the one, and prefigur'd by the other, the *Jews* with whom he has to do in the Text, seem to labour under great Degrees

174 SERMON IX.

grees of a wilful Blindness in not discerning (as the *Samaritan Woman* did *John* iv. 29.) the Person that now convers'd with 'em to be the *Messias* they look'd for; especially when besides other Grounds of Conviction, he referr'd himself to their Law, their Memory and Conscience, as well as to the Testimony of their own Eyes and Ears. To make good which, I come now to examine under my

II. Head, The Nature and Force of that Evidence which the Scriptures of the Old Testament afford in reference to a *Messias*, and thro' him, a Life eternal.

Now this was so very strong, and made up of such a Complication of Proofs, that any Person divested of Prejudice, and acquainted with the Model of the *Jewish* Religion, must needs acquiesce in it as an Institution directly and plainly pointing to a *Messias* to come. But then when he was come, and convers'd every Day with those that expected him, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, assisted by this Circumstance, may

SERMON IX. 175

may be said to afford the *Jews* a double Evidence, one of Faith, and another of Sense.

For the first sort of Evidence, I call the moral Grounds of Belief so, because the Apostle terms *Faith the Evidence of things not seen*, Heb xi. 1. And since the *Jewish* Covenant was one of Promise, and expected things future and at a distance, they could not enjoy a greater Certainty of the good Things to come by a *Messias*, than their whole OEconomy afforded. The Promise of a Saviour from *the Seed of a Woman* was not only clear and exprefs, but as Old almost as Transgression itself. And as this Hope supported the Minds, and was part of the Religion of the Patriarchs, so was the same Faith advanc'd and encourag'd by constant Types, Emblems and Prophecies from the Church in the Wilderness, even beyond the building of the second Temple: Not to mention *the Paschal Lamb*, and the Passage thro' the Red Sea, or the Person to whom, and Manner wherein the Law was given on Mount *Sinai*; the whole

woodqorT

126 SERMON IX.

Service of the *Tabernacle and Temple*, the Consecration and Order of the *Priesthood*, with the Number and Nature of the *Sacrifices*, especially those of *Expiation and Thanksgiving*, did so exactly point to some proper *Antitype*, that the *Jews* did not only with great reason expect one in the blessed *Jesus*, but kept the Tables of their Pedigree and Lineage with the greatest Exactness, that they might not err in the Tribe from which so great a Blessing was to spring. But still the Prophecies were a new Support to the Faith of the *Jews* in this respect; for they are so numerous, and some of 'em so explicate and clear, and all of 'em so exactly concurring, in the Time or Place, the Manner or Attendants of his Birth, that as there was no room to doubt the Event, so was there as little to deny or mistake it when it should happen. Not to mention *Ezekiel* and other Prophets, there is in the *Seventy Weeks of Daniel*, or the four hundred and ninety Years assign'd by him for the whole Period of the *Messias*, such a strict and wonderful Harmony in Fact and Prophecy,

SERMON IX. 177

Prophecy, in Prediction and Accomplishment, that even a modern Jew will hardly presume to evade it.

But then when the *Messias* did make his Appearance, and live, and preach, and work Miracles among the *Jews*, they were oblig'd even by an Evidence of Sense to own him for such; for they not only saw and heard, the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk, and were Ear-witnesses to the Sermons of one who spoke as never Man spoke, but they had heard doubtless of the strange Manner of his Conception, the Star at his Birth, the Adorations of the *Magi*, to which we may add too the Testimony of his Forerunner, who declares himself to be the Voice of one crying in the Wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord. Now when all these Proofs are put in one Scale, and the Weight still increased by the Evidence to be found in their own Books, and to which we find our Saviour referring, thence may it not be almost literally affirm'd of 'em, that they had Eyes and saw not, Ears and heard not? But as clear Grounds

touch

N

of

of Conviction as the *Jews* had in reference to this important Truth: 'Tis the Happiness of Christians to act still upon bigger and brighter Motives, and to depend upon so sure a Word of Prophecy as to leave no place for Scruple or Unbelief. And this I hope to make appear by applying in the

III. Place, the Duty urg'd in this Text to those who are concern'd in the Benefits of the Christian Revelation.

The Command given in the Text of searching the Scriptures, though it directly concern'd the *Jews*, yet will it in Consequence reach all those who partake of a Covenant founded on better Promises. The New Testament is the same in Substance with the Old, and the Gospel of *Christ* differs from the Law of *Moses*, rather in the time and manner of the Promulgation, than in the matter and object of it: But as the *Jews* enjoy'd a *Messias* in prospect only, and we look back upon him as already come, our Advantage is at least so much the greater in respect of Evidence

SERMON IX. 179

dence and Satisfaction, as Things past are better prov'd and explain'd than Things to come. Upon this foot I shall first briefly enquire upon what Motives the Christian Covenant will deserve our strictest Search, and then as briefly direct how the Search is to be made: Now the Grounds of our Enquiry are chiefly these three, (1.) That the Scriptures of the New Testament are more enlightening and instructive. (2.) Afford more Comfort and Refreshment; and (3.) Are attended with freer Measures of divine Grace and Assistance.

In the first Case, that they are clearer and more instructive none can dispute; for in the Gospel the *Veil of Moses* is taken off, and the *Shadow of good Things to come*, chang'd into the very Substance and Reality. The Doctrine of a Life eternal which lay before shrouded in Figures is now brought into the clearest Light, and both the Nature and Worship of God describ'd in such a manner that we are taught to serve him *in Spirit and in Truth*, and encour-

rag'd so to do, because we know him to be *the Rewarder of those that diligently seek him*. As for the Articles of our Faith they depend most of 'em upon such plain and well attested Matters of Fact, that the Mysteries of a Trinity and a God Incarnate are as evident to Faith, as Colours are visible to the Eye, and the pardon of Sin, and the graces of the Spirit, the rising of the Body, and a Life immortal to ensue upon it, are Truths which challenge a very easy assent, when *Christ* has cancell'd Sin, and purchas'd our Peace by the Sacrifice of himself; and by raising his own Body has asserted all his Members into a State of Immortality. And thus too the Case stands with the Precepts of the Christian Covenant, they are wrote now in fair and capital Characters, and neither so liable to Mistake or Evasion as those of the *Mosaic*. To omit those relating to Rites and Modes, and which concern'd the *Jews* as a peculiar People, the moral Duties of the Decalogue are better explain'd, and enforc'd upon higher Principles, and

SERMON IX. 181

and our blessed Lord instead of destroying, did so far improve or fill 'em up, as in many Instances to remove the Guilt from the Hand to the Heart, and make the Eye and the Thoughts Criminal, even before they advanc'd to any Act of Impurity. Besides that, Repentance and Self-denial are an improvement of Morality very worthy of, if not peculiar to so sublime and pure an Institution as that of *Christ*.

But farther yet, the Gospel-Revelation bespeaks our Search, as it ministers to our Spirits the highest and purest Refreshments, and fills the Conscience with a *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*. The Jewish Dispensation was all over Toil and Labour, and the Service it enjoin'd might well be call'd a Yoke of Ceremonies, but so contrary to *that easy and light one* impos'd by our Christian Law-giver, that *the Apostle*, Acts xv. 10, *calls it a Burthen which neither his Disciples, nor their Fathers were able to bear*. Besides that, every Duty almost upbraided 'em with their Guilt, and serv'd as a *Ministry of Condemnation*,

demnation, whilst the Blood of Bulls and Goats which they very well knew could not take away Sin, did but faintly shadow the real Atonement to be made for it. They saw their Sin and Shame and wanted to be cover'd with a Robe of Righteousness, but the Grace of the Gospel had not yet swallow'd up the Rigour of the Law, so that the Conscience of an uncancell'd Guilt must needs fill 'em with Terror instead of Peace and Comfort; whereas on the other side there Results a most pleasing Assurance (or in the Apostle's Language) a most blessed fulness of Hope to every Christian in the Contemplation and Exercise of every part of his Religion; for being fully assur'd that Christ our Passover is sacrific'd for us, we are certain too that there is no Condemnation to those that are in him, and who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit. As for the Duties of our Calling they are not only delightful because they are Rational, but as they are enforc'd upon the noblest Motives, the Enjoyment of God, and an endless Life;

not

SERMON IX. 183

not the *Milk and Honey* of an earthly *Canaan*, but *Rivers of Pleasure* at *God's right Hand*, and such *Glories* as *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor hath it enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive*. And when the *Doctrines* of the *Gospel* centre chiefly in this future *State of Happiness*, and are all confirmed by *exceeding great and precious Promises*; what *Refreshments* can equal those which must needs flow from so certain as well as glorious a *Prospect of good Things* to come?

But still, besides the *Comfort* of this *Enquiry*, 'tis another great *Inducement* to it, that the *divine Grace and Assistance* does ever attend it. The *Spirit of God* does not only enlighten and clarify the *Mind* in its *Search* after *divine Truths*, but it purifies the *Heart* and raises the *Affections* to *Heaven*; and at the same time his *divine Word* is a *Lanthorn to our Feet, and a Light unto our Paths*. We find it *powerful*, likewise as a *two edged Sword*; for that when we are devoutly engag'd in this *sacred Study* our *Hearts* will burn

184 SERMON IX.

within us, like those of the travelling Disciples our Saviour conferr'd with. In short, besides the glorious Advantage of knowing the good and acceptable Will of God, and being thereby *made wise unto Salvation*, we may hope the Grace of God will so co-operate with us in the holy Exercise as not only to teach, but incite us both to *Will and to do according to his good Pleasure*.

But I leave the Motives to this Enquiry, and propose a brief Direction or two in reference to it. Now since the Gospel of *Christ* is a Treasury of the richest and most necessary Knowledge, our Enquiry ought to bear some Proportion to the value and moment of the Truths and Maxims therein contain'd; and then it must be strict and diligent at least, as well as sincere and impartial.

In pursuance of the first Rule our search of the holy Scriptures ought to be very strict and diligent, and our Application such as becomes those who are enquiring of God's own Oracles, *what they shall do to be saved*. The
Christian

SERMON XL. 2 1831

Chryſtian System is the *great Myſtery of Godlineſs*, i. e. the Power and Wiſdom of God concurring in the Redemption of Man: And ſince it reveals to us *Secrets hid from the Foundation of the World*, and ſuch as *the Angels deſire to look into*, we cannot employ too much Care and Pains in ſo heavenly an Entertainment. I do not here contend that every private Perſon is to attempt a nice and critical Knowledge of all the difficult Points or Caſes that occur in Scripture; for this would be a Buſineſs of great Learning and many Years. But ſince every Diſciple of *Chriſt* is obliged to give a *Reason of the Hope that is in him*, and the Truths and Precepts which moſt concern him are level and obvious to the loweſt Underſtanding, and are beſides of ſuch a Nature, that they muſt be learn'd and practis'd at the hazard of his Soul, and the Forfeiture of his Happineſs upon the Neglect. This ſeems to beſpeak no mean degree of Industry in ſearching Writings of ſo wide an importance. We find it mention'd to the Honour of the *Perſebyters*, that they ſearched the Scriptures,

186 SERMON IX.

tures, in way of Proof or Evidence; and since they are *written for our Learning* as well as theirs, it is equally our Duty and Credit to examine 'em strictly, that so *the Word of God may dwell richly in us in all Wisdom.* And what should divert us from paying a closer Attention to the great Truths of God, than to the Apothegms of a *Plato*, the Images of a *Virgil*, or the Rhetoric of a *Tully* or *Demosthenes*? Certainly, if we consider the Scriptures as the Word and Message of God, nay as the Testament of a dying Redeemer, and all other Compositions as the mere Breath and Invention of fallible Men; it would make us transfer the greatest Part of our Study from profane to sacred Authors, and send us to the Scriptures as a Fountain of living Waters, and a Repository of the best, because saving Knowledge.

But, to conclude; another Rule for our Search of the Scripture is, that it be with the sincerest and most impartial View and Intention. These are Writings dictated by the very Spirit of God himself, and must therefore be consulted with
pure

SERMON IX. 187

pure Hearts, and Minds the best dispos'd for Improvement. The Rules and Doctrines contain'd in 'em are design'd to make us know more, that we may live better, and not to entertain our Thoughts with barren Notions, or *the Oppositions of Science falsely so called*. St. Paul has assur'd us that the Preaching of the Cross does not consist in *the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*; so that 'tis a false End which some propose in this Search, to gratify their Fancies with the Beauties of Language, or fine Schemes either of Rhetoric or Reasoning. Not but that the Scriptures will even this way answer the biggest Expectation, since no Historian ever wrote with the Majesty of *Moses*, or any Orator ever pleaded with the Address and Spirit of *St. Paul*. But the great Design of the Gospel being to make us holy and bring us to Heaven, our main End in the Perusal should not be to please a vain or a curious Humour, but to instruct and edify the Conscience, *and make the Man of God perfect*. Whenever therefore we search this sacred Repository of divine Truths, let

188 SERMON IX.

let us bring with us a serious purpose of better Life, as well as a sincere Desire of better Information: Let us not presume to search these Oracles for Matter of Novelty or Dispute, either to try the Parts, or stagger the Principles of other Men, but to furnish our Mouths with Arguments, and our Lives with Innocence to defend and adorn our holy Faith; that so being *as ready Scribes instructed to the Kingdom of God*, we may by a Growth in Knowledge, as well as Grace, proceed from one degree of Faith to another, till we arrive at length to the very *Stature of the Fulness of Christ*.

Amen.



SERMON



S E R M O N X.

The great Duty of Restitution explain'd and enforc'd from the Example of *Zaccheus*.



LUKE XIX. 8.

And if I have taken any thing from any Man by false Accusation, I restore it fourfold.



HIS is a very fair and open Challenge; and as it speaks the Courage and Freedom of a pure Conscience, so may it pass amongst the many great and good Patterns propos'd to our Imitation,

as

as a very singular Instance of Probity and Goodness. 'Tis true that Charity and Justice are among those Dictates which lie uppermost in the Mind; and the latter of these Virtues is so genuine a Source of the former, that we cannot be much surpris'd to find the good Publican in the Text so ready to deal out half his Goods to the Poor, when he was so well dispos'd to restore, in a Quadruple Proportion, whatever he had wrongfully seiz'd or detain'd. But tho' Justice and Mercy are thus nearly allied, not only between 'emselfes, but to our common Nature; yet Men are sunk into a strange Degeneracy as to this Point, and there are sprung up so many and various Arts of Fraud and Oppression, that there is hardly any Quarter allow'd to Simplicity and Plaindealing; except perhaps among those People whom we style barbarous, because they are not yet refin'd and polish'd into all the Methods of Guile and Deceit. At least, if we cast an Eye upon the general Commerce of Mankind, it will be no Satyr to affirm, but surely very proper to observe and reflect, that
between

between the Pride and Vanity of some, and the Lusts and Cruelty of others, an hearty and conscientious Probity is almost banish'd. Thus 'tis obvious to discern that the same Persons who want a Spirit to do the least good, will want the Justice to compensate for the greatest Evil, and Avarice is so ready to grasp and detain what once it has seiz'd, that whoever but covets another's Property, is enter'd into a Plot against Charity and Justice, and seems to have taken his last leave of an upright Principle. Now this is so essential to the State of a Christian, as such, that *Zacchæus* would not presume to offer himself as a Candidate for it, till he had given this clear Test of an Heart without Guile, and a *Conscience void of Offence*. *If, says he, I have taken away any thing from any Man, &c.* In discoursing upon which Words I shall be oblig'd,

I. To examine the general Nature of the great Duty of Restitution, implied in, and recommended from them.

II. To prove that unless we practise this Duty in all possible Instances, we shall

SERMON IX.

shall forfeit both the Title and Recompence of Christians. And this will make room,

III. For an Application of the whole, by two or three practical Reflections.

I. I am then to begin with the general Nature of the Duty which lies couch'd under the Expression of restoring four-fold. But tho' the Proportion here mention'd was doubtless enjoin'd by the Jewish Law, and establish'd upon Maxims of Civil Policy, yet are we concern'd only in the moral Equity of this Rule; and as that will best direct us in the Measure and Degree of any Returns or Compensations to be made by us, so wherever a good Conscience is our Casuist, it will guide us likewise to the special Instances. To know then what Restitution is, (and we cannot make it, unless we do so) 'twill be to the purpose to enquire into the several Kinds of Damage which challenge Restitution, the Persons who are oblig'd to make it, and the Manner in which 'tis to be made.

SERMON X. 193

Now as to the several sorts of Wrong or Injustice which bespeak the Exercise of this Duty, they are doubtless all those, how many so ever, by which one Man can trespass upon another. For though the Cases of Wrong may be so involv'd and perplex'd, that some will not admit an Equivalent, and others are such, that the Offender cannot make it; yet every Evil which Men do, calls (by the Voice of Reason and Equity) for some amends; and he that refuses to make it to the best of his Power, is a Debtor to the Welfare of his Brother, and the Integrity of his own Conscience. But then since every Man is capable of suffering in the threefold Respect of Person, Credit, or Property, I conceive that whoever invades any of these Rights, is oblig'd to restore or repay (in the best manner he can) what he has usurp'd; and the more directly and wilfully he is concern'd in the Damage, the more strictly is he requir'd to restore or make it up.

The main Subject or Matter of Wrong is Property, which being a Term that comprehends Men's Fortunes and Estates,

Q

must

must needs afford a large Field for Fraud and Cozenage; and in Consequence, as ample Matter for Repentance and Restitution. Now a Man may invade his Neighbour's Goods by Theft and Violence, or keep him out of Possession by base Arts or unfair Delays: We may commit this Injury by Breach of Contract, as well as direct Seisure, by not cancelling a just Debt, by withholding a Loan, or abusing a Trust, as much as by a formal Act of Robbery and Oppression: Nay St. *Augustine*, I remember, votes that Man a Thief who detains what he has found, after he knows the Owner. Now as often as Men offend in any one or all of these Instances, they break the Laws of commutative Justice, and must either restore what they have thus usurp'd or withheld, or contract a Guilt no other way to be cancell'd. For since Restitution is nothing else but putting the just Owner in Possession of his Right, he that fails to do this, coins a sort of Property to himself and so robs God and Man in one and the same Act. And for this Reason the Prophet

S E R M O N X. 195

Prophet *Ezekiel* makes it the Mark of a wicked Man to *detain the Pledge*, and an Earnest of *Life and Pardon* to restore it.

But Men may be farther wrong'd in their Persons and Credit, their Fame or their Limbs: And since they have as fair and indefeasable a Right to these, as to any other Branch of Property, it becomes an Act of Justice not to be dispens'd with to restore or compensate what Wrongs we may have done or caus'd, even of this kind: so that if through ill Nature, or ill Fortune we have stripp'd our Neighbour of his good Name, or but lessen'd the Odour and Frangency of it, if we have marr'd it by the Venom of our own Tongues, or undermin'd it by the Guile and Malice of other Men's; we stand engag'd to such a Restitution, as may set the injur'd Party right in the publick Opinion, as well as repair the Disorder of his Mind, or any other real Loss he may have sustain'd.

And thus the Matter stands likewise in the Damages of Health or Limbs, or

196 S E R M O N X.

any Outrage done upon the Body. For if by my Hand or Procurement, my Authority or Connivance, another receives such a Maim or Hurt, as proves at once a Blemish to his Person, and the Loss perhaps of his daily Bread; tho' I cannot restore him the Eye he has lost, or the Limb that is wither'd; yet Justice as well as Mercy command me to repair (to my Power) his double Damage both of Pain and Loss. And since all these things must be some way redress'd, as Trepasses upon common Equity; so may we easily be guided to the Persons, who are to redress 'em, and the Manner whereby the Reparation is to be made.

For not only are those oblig'd to compensate the Wrong who have done it in Person, but such as have occasion'd it to be done by any Instrument or Proxy: And where the Debt of Restitution remains unpaid by the Principal, the Wrong is to be discharg'd even by a Guardian or Trustee: At least those who are engag'd in the Trust, are concern'd in Conscience, where the Will or Testament

Testament proves silent or defective, to repair any Fraud or Damage they are conscious of, or have been made privy to. For as no Man can justly possess what is not his own, so will the Injury remain till the wrong'd Party is put into the same State from which he was driven by it. But how then must the Compensation be made? In such a Manner, without doubt, as the Nature of the Wrong, and the Circumstances of the Person will admit. The same thing must be restor'd, if possible, which is purloin'd or detain'd: If not, something at least of equal Use and Benefit to the Owner. Or should these Opportunities fail us, the last and lowest Amends, is a sincere Sorrow for the ill we may have done, and a real and hearty Intention to repair it as soon and as fully as we can. Nor is this a Matter only of private Honour and Decorum, but of eternal Duty and Obligation: The Good of this World, and the Happiness of the next sublist upon it; and 'tis but the least Part of the Doom which awaits such unjust Detainers, which *Job* has mention'd

198 SERMON X.

in his twentieth Chapter, *that in the Fulness of their Sufficiency they shall be in Straits*. I come now then under my

II. Head, To shew the absolute Necessity of this Duty to entitle us to the Name or Reward of Christians.

There are some Actions so fit and congruous, and others so vile and unhandsome in their first Appearance, that there wants no Law but that written on Men's Hearts to enforce or repress 'em; and among the former, these two will be found to bear a very early Date, to do no wrong, and to repair any we may happen to have done. This is the Voice of Nature; and as all human Laws are founded upon this Plan, the Laws almost of all Nations have provided for this Branch of Justice; and *Moses, Exod. xxix.* has fix'd the Proportion from a double to a fivefold Restitution, in the several Cases of *Theft* or *Trespass*, *Damage* or *Mischance*. But whatever be the Force or Penalty of other Laws, the Christian Law, which is pure and perfect, and so binds the Conscience, as a full and adequate Rule of Duty, does so loudly and fully

fully press that of Reparation, that any wilful defect in this Point will hazard the entire Benefit of that blessed Covenant. Now the Grounds upon which the Gospel demands this Proof of our Integrity, and that upon the forfeiture of our Pardon and Happiness, may be these chiefly :

I. That not to restore or repay in any instance of Wrong or Damage Men commit, is directly opposite to the Love of God and our Neighbour. The first of these Principles is certainly the Foundation of the other, and both so genuine Proofs of that *pure and undefiled Religion* profess'd by Christians, that if their *Faith* does not *work by Love*, 'tis all false and counterfeit. To this purpose our Blessed Lord has declar'd the Love of God in the *first Commandment*, and because the second (the Love of our Neighbour) *is so like unto it*; the Apostles styles it *a Royal Law*, and the Moral part of the *Jewish Religion* was made to center in these two great Precepts. But then is it not too plain a Proof that we have little regard to ei-

ther, if we dare invade God's Right thro' the Person or Property of our Brother, when we snatch or detain any part of his Dues by Fraud or Violence, and will not restore 'em in Honour to God's Law or his Image, the Claims I mean of Justice, or the Needs of our Neighbour? So loud and crying a Sin has this ever been accounted, that wherever we find the Character, we meet the Curse too of those who *grind the Faces of the Poor, rob the House of the Widow, and oppress the Hireling in his Wages*: And had not the Apostles Precept been so very exprefs, *that no Man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any matter*; the Duty of Restitution would have stood firm upon the force of this Rule, *Owe no Man any thing, but to love one another*. For what do these Words imply but a most easy and obvious, because natural Law of Equity? What do they enjoin but a part of that Moral Goodness which had a Being before the World, and has remained the same ever since? As therefore this Duty could want no new Revelation

tion to explain or enforce it, so did the best Men under the Old Testament govern their Practice by it; and the Prophet *Samuel* who could but discern *thro' a Glass darkly* the Purity of the Christian Law, or the Greatness of the Christian Reward; in honour to the great Trust he bore asserted the Justice of God's Choice, as well as the Integrity of his own Heart by this honest and publick Appeal. 1 Sam. xii. 3. *Lo, here I am, witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed, &c.*

2. But still to possess or withhold what we have no Right to is contrary to Repentance, and for that reason to our Pardon and Happiness; for all Conditions of either are finally resolv'd into this one, and 'tis flatly affirm'd that *without Repentance there is no Remission*. But then if Repentance means a real Concern for any Trespas committed against God or Man, and as real a Design to atone or retract it, what will become of the Penitent where no Reformation ensues? And yet will it not prove as true of such Sinners, as of those

those upon whom *the Tower of Siloam* fell, that *except they repent they shall all likewise perish*? In Sins of a more private and abstracted kind, such as pass only between God and a Man's own Heart; the *Sacrifice of a broken Spirit* will find Acceptance; but in Cases of Actual, Wrong, and Injury, the Sorrow must part from the Heart to the Tongue or Hand by which they were committed; and we must not only grieve for the Trespass, but speak our Grief by such proper Actions as may best and soonest remove the Scandal, and repair the Damage. If this be not done, can we be more truly said to repent of Fraud, or Injustice, than that Person of Blasphemy, who every Minute takes God's Name in vain; or he of Bloodshed who breaths nothing but Fury and Revenge? Perhaps Men resolve to be just and restore at one time or other, but this is a Fallacy which *a wicked*, as well as *a deceitful Heart* is not to be trusted with; for since every Minute's Detention aggravates the Wrong, as it helps to perpetuate an Act of Injustice; a Person
who

who but intends well can never too soon disgorge the Bait of unjust Gain; for not only *Riches got by Deceit* will not prosper, but they will gnaw the Conscience like a Canker, and eat out its present as well as future Peace. In Proof of this that our Blessed Lord who appointed the Sacrament of his own Body, as the Pledge and Seal of our Pardon when we do repent, has forbid us *to bring our Gift to the Altar* till we are *reconciled to our Brother*; but then the only means to be reconcil'd (at least upon the Principles of Christian Charity) is what we find in that pathetic Exhortation our Church has set before her Communion Service, that we revoke and cancel all Wrongs and Injuries done by us to any other, being ready to make Restitution and Satisfaction to the best of our Power. To conclude then, the Application will reach two sorts of People, and to them therefore it may be fairly addressed.

The first are those whose Hearts and Hands are yet guiltless and unstain'd with any Act, or evil Thought of Injustice.

justice. This is a very happy State of Conscience, and those who enjoy it will easily admit of this sober and wholesom Advice, to decline all those ways which lead, whether by a strait or indirect Course, to Fraud and Cozenage; and since a Man may become unjust not only by a willful Abuse of Power, which is downright Oppression, or by the Tricks and Frauds of a circumventing Wit, but by Folly and Imprudence, by the Excesses of a vicious, or the Snares and Temptations of an idle Life; is it not the Business of an honest Man, and the very Ornament of a Christian to refrain those Lusts which first *War against our own Souls*, and then make such wretched havock of the Peace, Welfare, and Property of our Neighbour? How many, for Instance, has that wild Phrenzy of Play and Gaming entirely sunk both in Credit and Fortune? How has it lost 'em the Glory and Reward of all the good Deeds required from their Station, and reduc'd 'em (it may be) to the Shame and Penance of necessary but hopeless Restitution! And
is

is it not thus likewise in the matter of Luxury and Excess, under what Pretence or Title soever 'tis encourag'd? For when a Man's Pride and Vanity are too wide for his Condition, he will soon nourish both at the Cost of his Neighbour; and hence 'tis that some contract Debts they never can, and others perhaps, which they never intend to pay: And since by these means there is infinite Wrong done on one side to the Fortunes, and on the other to the Consciences of Men; he that prevents these Mischiefs by a Life of strict Piety and Temperance is like to be the wisest Man for himself, the justest to others, and the most acceptable to God.

Once more; if there be any (whether among those that hear me or not) from whom Justice exacts this Duty of Reparation (for the Doctrine is general, and the Explication will extend beyond any single Audience) such Persons would do the World and their Conscience the greatest Right to discharge this sort of Arrears as soon as possible; for every Minute we detain
what

what belongs to another we add new Weight to a wilful Sin, and if we die in it we are past Repentance. It may appear perhaps, and prove pretty difficult to part with those Gains, which however compass'd, we have been us'd for many Years to call our own (and this may be one reason why 'tis pronounc'd *so hard* a matter for *the rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; that his Wealth being too unjustly got, is the more unwillingly surrendered.) But since this must be done, or our Happiness be forfeited; let us balance the Damage and Advantage by putting to our Conscience this Question, *What shall it profit a Man if he shall gain the whole World and lose his own Soul?* And since the great Obstacle to this piece of Justice, is either a covetous Spirit, or a wrong Sense of Shame; the surest way to remove both will be to beseech God to direct our Hearts and *renew a right Spirit within us.*

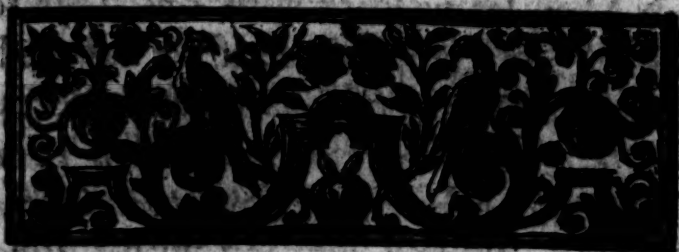
To conclude then, *Let the wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man*

SERMON X. 207

Man his Thoughts; if we have wrong'd any Man, let us learn with Zaccheus to restore and compensate; if we have failed in the Offices of Charity and Mercy, let us cease to do evil, and learn to do well; and since we know that Charity, especially in Company with Justice, shall cover the multitude of Sins, let us make to ourselves Friends of the false or unrighteous Mammon, that when we fail they may receive us into everlasting Habitations.



SERMON



S E R M O N XI.

The Nature, Design, and Benefit
of *Christ's* Temptation.



LUKE iv. 13.

*And when the Devil had ended all
the Temptation, he departed from
him for a season.*



HERE is not a better
proof of the Being and Exi-
stence of evil Spirits in ge-
neral, nor a stronger Evi-
dence of the extream hatred which
the Devil, the Prince and Leader of
'em

em bears to God and Man, than the wicked Assaults we find made by him in the foregoing Verses upon our Blessed Lord and Saviour, who was God and Man in one Person. But when it pleased God to send his Son into the World to destroy the Works of the Devil, we are not to wonder that all the Powers of Hell were let loose upon him. The Devil, tho' now chain'd down to an Abyss of Darknes, was once an Angel of Light; but as in the loss of Heaven he lost all Propensions to Goodness, so upon his Revolt from God, did he attempt to erect a Kingdom of his own, and will always strive to People it by *working in the Hearts of the Children of Disobedience*. Upon this Ground commenc'd that eternal Enmity between the Seed of the Woman and that of the Serpent, an Enmity which can no more be reconcil'd than Good and Evil; *for what communion hath Light with Darknes, or what fellowship hath Christ with Belial?* But then if his Malice be so great against Man for being made capable of

P

the

210 SERMON XI.

the Happiness he had since lost and forfeited; we shall not be surpriz'd to find him rage and swell to an high degree against the blessed Person by whom it was recover'd. The *Hebrew* Child was now born that was to silence his Oracles, destroy his Kingdom, and retrieve the Souls and Bodies possess'd by him; and this was enough to put him upon an Enterprize, which (considering the Subtilty of so sagacious a Spirit) the Event shew'd to be as weak as it was desperate: For after three several Efforts made, which we may presume wanted not any Rhetorick to enforce 'em; the Text informs us, that *when the Devil had ended all the Temptation, he departed from him for a season.*

In discoursing upon this remarkable Passage in our Saviour's History, I propose to follow this Method.

I. I shall form some brief Remarks upon the Instrument and the Nature of the Temptation here mention'd.

II. I shall assign some Reasons for our Blessed Saviour's permitting himself to be thus tempted: And

III. I

III. I shall more largely apply the Instances (by some practical Inferences) to the State and Condition of all Christians.

I. And to begin with the Instrument of the Temptation here mention'd. Tho' the Text uses an Appellative which imports at large an Accuser, Betrayer, or Adversary, (for all these are imply'd in the Word *Διὰ τοῦ*) yet we cannot doubt since even the Devil's Kingdom is not without some Order, but it was the very Prince of the Devils, the first and blackest of the revolted Spirits who undertook so daring and hellish an Enterprize. Some Fiend of a lower Order might have assaulted, and perhaps with too good Success, a mere Man; but when the Son of God, the express *Word and Wisdom of the Father*, was to be tempted, who should be the Tempter but the *Father of Lies and the Prince of Darkness*? What Form he assum'd for making this Trial we have nothing to judge by; but if we look back to the first Temptation he ever practis'd upon Earth, as he then

112 SERMON XI.

wore an Appearance more like to dazle than affright, so may we be allow'd to imagine, that now if ever the old Serpent chang'd himself into an Angel of Light, because his Business was to deceive and seduce a Person so much wiser and more perfect than our first Parent.

However this be, the Temptations he apply'd were of no common sort, but very suitable to the Craft as well as Malice of the Tempter. As God cannot possibly tempt Men to Evil, so neither can the Devil try or prove us for our Good; but there being degrees of Mischief, and a wide difference in the Evils he suggests or prompts Men to; as the Holy *Jesus* was a Divine Person, so was it the Design of his and our great Enemy to have betray'd him into a Complication of the blackest Crimes, *i. e.* the basest Distrust, the grossest Idolatry, and the wildest Presumption. He knew very well that a Person so pure and holy in his Nature and even Conception, was not to be betray'd by any sensual Lust or Appetite, and therefore

SERMON XI. 213

put him to *wrestle not with Flesh and Blood, but with spiritual Wickedness*, for the Things propos'd were address'd directly to the Mind, and had that Motive chiefly to recommend 'em by which this evil Spirit had seduced himself: I mean Pride and Self-love. So that had it been possible for the Blessed *Jesus* to have been vanquish'd in this Conflict, he must have been in a great measure his own Tempter: for but just to touch the Particulars,

When the Dèvil tempts his Lord and Maker to change Stones into Bread, he would make him not only to distrust, but deny his Father's Power and his own, by commanding any Element or Creature to supply his Wants; and therefore instead of performing this Miracle which he could have done, (had it not been to gratify so vile a Suggestion) he appeal'd to another, the having been sustain'd so long without Bread; and that serv'd to make good in Fact the truth of his Answer, *That Man does not live by Bread alone, but*

314 SERMON XI.

by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of God.

As for the next Suggestion it was levelled against the Sovereignty of God, and attempted not only to alienate the Worship due to him by transferring it to an Idol, but to deprave as well as depretiate it to the lowest degree by making a damn'd Spirit the Object of it. But because this Temptation was so very monstrous, it concern'd the Tempter to shew how truly he was the Prince of the Air, by opening a Landskip of worldly Glories, and ushering in the Experiment with an *All this will I give Thee!* A Bait indeed rich enough to have gain'd him a great number of Subjects; and happy that it was laid for one who acted in the stead of an whole World, and was alone able to withstand it; Tho' the Instance may help us to this serviceable Reflexion; that worldly Glory can never bear the Rate which Men put upon it; when the Devil himself thought it no great Bribe to gain 'em over to Sin and Apostasy.

To

To his third and last Attempt, (the persuading our Saviour *to cast himself headlong* from the Verge of the Temple) I shall only say this, that neither did his Case require, nor could his Wisdom approve so rash an Experiment. Tho' *Satan* was permitted to tempt him, he was too just and good to tempt his Father; and since therefore he had allowed the Tempter to convey this holy Person to the top or Summit of so holy a Place, it was an excellent Reason, why he should not descend by any uncommon way, that the same wicked Agent might be oblig'd to his farther Shame and Confusion now, as well as his utter Destruction afterwards, to deliver him safe to the Place where he found him. But to pass from the bare History to the moral Use of this Passage, I shall endeavour to shew in the

II. Place, The main Reason and Design of our Saviour's permitting so long and violent a Temptation upon himself.

Now this being mention'd both in this Chapter and the fourth of St. *Mat-*

216 SERMON XI.

threw, together with our blessed Lord's Retirement and Abstinence in the Desert, we may pronounce the general Ground and Reason of this whole Discipline to be one and the same, *viz.* The better to prepare himself by so strict and austere a Course of Life for the great Work of his Ministry, which in the main Parts of it was a Doctrine of Self-denial. But now since to oppose Temptation is the noblest Instance of this Duty, our blessed Master, tho' he did no way invite the Tempter to invade or molest his Solitude; yet would he not decline the Conflict at least for these two Reasons. (1.) That he might instruct, as well as encourage us to bear and baffle Temptation; and (2.) That he might begin that Triumph here over Sin and *Satan*, which his Ascension into Heaven was to compleat.

1. Then: Our most gracious Redeemer was pleas'd to submit himself to this sharp Contest, in order to make us expert in the same Warfare, and thro' the Power of his Grace to bring us off *more than* Conquerors?

SERMON XI. 217

Conquerors. He was just now going to preach a Religion which consisted in Patience and Suffering, in *subduing Men's Lusts, renouncing the World, and resisting unto Blood, striving against Sin.* And since this was no easy Task in itself, and would be render'd still more difficult by those Allurements or Obstacles the great Enemy of Souls would cast in the way: Our holy Lawgiver, who was to be *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* to all his Followers, would not leave us to tread so rugged and dangerous a Path without a Guide. He knew whereof we were made, and that every Sin without his Example to animate, would easily beset and vanquish us too: And therefore he would not leave us to our own Frailties, but became our Precedent in the Point of bearing and resisting Temptation, as well as our Pattern in every Instance of Duty and Obedience. So that whenever the Tempter accosts us, we may hope to repress his Insolence with a *Get thee behind me Satan!* 'Twas an Amulet us'd by *Christ* himself, who having been *entcompass'd with Infirmities,*
and

218 SERMON XI.

and tempted in our Nature, is *both able and ready to succour those that are tempted*, Heb. ii. 18. But then the

2. Ground for our blessed Lord's enduring this Temptation, was that he might thus far vanquish the Enemy of his Kingdom, and begin his Triumph over Sin, when he began to preach the Doctrine of Salvation. 'Twas Transgression which brought Mankind into a State of Death; and as Sin would be the surest way to ruin and undo him, so would it prove the surest Method to make him sin, to pursue him with Temptation. Since therefore the great End of *Christ's* coming into the World was *to destroy the Works of the Devil*, could this be effected in a better way, than by opposing infinite Wisdom and Power, in his own Person, to the Wiles and Stratagems of this subtil Spirit? This must certainly damp the Fury as well as Pride of the Tempter, to perceive the fiery Darts of so many and fierce Assaults so easily quench'd. Hitherto he had possess'd a very large Sway, and led the World into Error and Ignorance; the Worship,
Faith,

SERMON XI. 219

Faith, and Practice of the Heathen World was superstitious, filthy, and abominable: And when the Devil could prevail on Men to worship Stocks and Stones, to take the Delusions of lying Dæmons for Oracles of Truth, and indulge 'em selves in the most impure Rites and Practices; he might be truly said to *lead 'em captive at his Will*. But in this Conflict he lost part of the *Armour in which he trusted*; his Reign and Range was from this Minute to be contracted; and as from the very Date of the Apostle's Commission our blessed Lord declares that *he saw Satan like Lightning fall from Heaven*; so upon his own Ascent thither did he *lead Captivity captive*, and retrieve us from that Bondage under which we had so long groan'd: Not but we are still liable to be tempted; but since *greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the World*, we shall find our selves able to say with the Apostle, *Thanks be to God, who giveth us Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1 Cor. xv. 57. But I proceed now to apply in the

III. Place,

III. Place, The Instance of the Text to the State and Condition of all Christians.

And the first Remark which occurs from it, is the Force and Power which evil Spirits have (within certain Bounds) to mix with our Spirits, and prompt and incite us to Evil. I might indeed urge from hence the Activity as well as Existence of those Beings, their Power to assume Shapes and work Wonders, and the Influence which God might still allow to bad, and does intrust to good Angels over the very Bodies of Men. But the Text and my Time confine me to the Subject of Temptation; and since that represents the worst of Spirits thus employ'd, the Inference is clear, that the Devil can suggest evil Thoughts to the Minds of Men, and being a Spirit himself, can steal and insinuate into them by such imperceptible Motions, as to seduce and betray 'em into the most wild as well as unwarrantable Thoughts and Actions. How he can thus pervade, as it were, our very Beings, and mix with the inward Thoughts and Movements of our Minds, cannot perhaps

SERMON XI. 221

haps be accounted for. 'Tis possible he may be able to corrupt the Fancy, or serve his Purpose by altering or improving the Objects of Sense; or he may dart an evil Thought into the Mind with the same Force and Swiftneſs with which Lightning can penetrate any natural Body. That Spirits, both good and bad, converſe with and know one another, is eaſy to ſuppoſe: And why the evil ones, which are made for Miſchief, ſhould not be able to ſeduce and tempt others to it, I cannot ſee. 'Tis a ſad Evidence of this Truth the enormous, and very often unnatural Crimes which paſs in the World: For though a naughty Heart be a very great Tempter; yet even Luſt and Malice might have Bounds, and *Cain* have ſtood clear of a Brother's Murder, had there not been a Devil walking *to and fro upon the Earth* (as he once own'd it was his Buſineſs) to tempt and corrupt Mankind. Nor can we doubt this, (however Temptation may be in the Language of Libertines a mere Fright of Fancy) when ſo many both good and bad Men have
been

222 SERMON XL

been suffer'd, for various Ends, to be thus tempted. The Case of *Job* was a Demonstration, to the purpose; and if we advance to the most finish'd Villany that ever was practis'd, the Treason of *Judas*; is it not expressly said, that *Satan* put it into his Heart to betray his Master? John xiii. 2. And were we to reason upon the Point, what sound Principle does it contradict, that one Spirit should act upon another? I mean directly, and without the Aid of any one Sense to convey the Temptation? Does not God, the Father of Spirits, by a real, tho' secret Impulse, both guide and enlighten the Minds of Men? How else can we be said to dwell in God, and he in us? And if Grace be not the working of the divine Spirit upon the Soul, i. e. the acting of one Spirit upon another, we cannot account for the Warmth, or even Sense of *David's* Petition, *Take not, O Lord, thy Holy Spirit from me.* But then if a good and holy Spirit can stamp a good Impression on the Soul, we must not deny (unless God had done so) a Power to evil Spi-

rits to raise and excite quite contrary Motions; unless we intend to dispute their very Being, which we shall find, in the Consequence of it, to be at no great Remove from Atheism. But,

2. If the evil Spirit be qualified, by his Nature, to prompt and move us to Mischief, we need not doubt but his Will will carry him to the very Extent of his Power; nay and beyond it too in his Endeavours to seduce and ruine us: For if his Rage and Malice so far transported him beyond his Policy, as to attempt a Person above the reach of the most hellish Wiles and Temptations; what should oppose his Assaults upon Man, where a much less degree of Force and Fraud might gain him a very easy as well as probable Conquest? That Spirit which presum'd to invade not only perfect Innocence, but infinite Truth and Wisdom, what should divert him from pursuing a frail and sinful Being, by the Wickedness as well as Deceitfulness of his own Heart already driven into the Toil? In the holy and blessed *Jesus* there met all those Properties which

which might deter the evil Spirit from so rash an Attempt; but Man is a Creature so enslav'd under the Bondage of Sin, that if *the roaring Lion seeks to devour*, who but God alone can deliver him? For,

3. We are taught from the Instance of the Text, that the Devil has not only a Power and will to tempt and betray us, but that our whole Life is in one respect or other, a constant Course and Scene of Temptation; at least the Intervals from it are so few as well as short and precarious, that the Rest we enjoy, instead of doubling our Care and Vigilance, does but add Strength and Force to the Temptations about us. The Devil, we find, did not so quit our Saviour as not to design a new and perhaps bolder Assault; he *departed only for a Season*, and resolv'd, without doubt, to watch the fittest for his Return: And does he not thus deal with Man? When he has us'd one Method of Trial, he does but retreat to apply another with the surer Success. He seduc'd us (perhaps Yesterday) by the World and the
Objects

Objects that surround us; or if he could not betray us by Vanity and Pleasure, he returns to morrow and strives to ensnare us by our selves, *i. e.* by kindling and feeding in us the Passions of Pride, Envy, or Revenge. If we escape the Temptations of our Eyes or Ears, *our Tables* or Couches shall be made a Snare to us; and when we think our selves safest, and the Tempter at the greatest distance, he is only putting on a new Form to deceive us; and 'tis well if our own Hearts do not assist the Delusion. One would think that when all our Senses were lock'd up, and no Avenue open for any Allurement, the Soul were then in a perfect State of Safety: But was not Sleep itself a Temptation, when our blessed Lord was forc'd to rouse his Disciples with this soft Rebuke, *What could ye not watch with me one Hour?* To be short, there is hardly any thing within or without us, our Reason and Passions, our Business and Diversions but what carry Temptation under one Disguise or other; and even Goodness itself may prove so, should it make us

Q

so

226 SERMON XII.

So far *Pharisees*, as to *despise others*, *trust in our own Righteousness*, and *blow the Trumpet before our Alms or Fasting*. And here the very best Men are liable to the most frequent and severe Shocks; for *when the evil Spirit finds the House swept and garnish'd*, i. e. the Mind duly purg'd from the corrupt Filth of Sin and Vice, then is it that he attempts a *Re-entry with seven wicked Spirits*; and if he be not repuls'd, *the last State of that Man is worse than the first*. Wherefore to conclude,

4. Since our great Enemy is both able and ready to tempt us, and that almost in every Moment and every Action of our Lives; does not our own Danger and our Lord's Example instruct and warn us to be upon our Guard, and to *watch and pray that we enter not into Temptation*? Indeed these two Directions may supersede those many Rules which are commonly prescrib'd upon this Occasion: For as Vigilance implies all those preventive Arts by which we are to guard against Surprise; I mean the due Regulation of our Thoughts and Appetites,

Appetites, as well as the prudent Conduct of our Eyes and Senses; so are there some Suggestions too stubborn and violent to be subdued in any other Posture than upon our Knees. Let us then besides *putting on the whole Armour of Righteousness*, fly to the sure Protection of this part of our Lord's Prayer, *Lead us not into Temptation; but deliver us from Evil*; and then that blessed Spirit which helps our Infirmities, will not suffer us to be *tempted beyond what we are able, &c.*



Q² SERMON



S E R M O N XII.

The Grounds and Pretences for the
common Neglect and Contempt
of religious Duties, illustrated
from the Parable of the great
Supper.



LUKE XIV. 18.

*And they all with one Consent be-
gan to make Excuse.*



THESE Words are part of
a Parable, which, tho' deli-
ver'd by two several Evan-
gelists under some Variety of
Dress and Expression, has yet the same
Meaning and Design in both: For the
Marriage

SERMON XII. 229

Marriage Feast in the twenty second of St. *Matthew*, and the great Supper in this Place, do equally represent the State of the Gospel, and all those Advantages, whether present or in Reversion, which a sincere and worthy Profession of it entitles Men to. The Master of the Feast cannot, in either Place, be understood for any other than that gracious Lord and Benefactor, who, by the *Sound of his Gospel*, hath called us to the State of Salvation. The Guests immediately design'd, and who by such vile and evasive Shifts declin'd the Invitation, were the *Jews*, to whom these glad Tidings were first promulg'd; and those admitted in their stead from the very *Streets and Highways*, were that mix'd Number out of all Nations whom God has been pleas'd to adopt into the Religion of his Son, and incorporate into the blessed Family of his Church. This is the short and clear Sense of the Parable, and the Design of it appears, from the Context, to have the same moral View which all *Christ's* Parables have in general, the shewing

Q 3

Men

230 SERMON XII.

Men their Failings by so near and sensible a Resemblance, that the Sight of the Picture might make 'em look into, and by that means mend and correct the Original. As a Proof of this, we need but repeat the Passage of the Text; *And they all with one Consent* (or presently, as it might be render'd) *began to make Excuse*. In order to a practical Improvement of this Passage, I shall consider it under the following Severals:

I. I shall examine the Merit, or rather shew the Weakness of those common Pleas or Pretences, which are made for the Breach or Contempt of our Christian Engagement.

II. I shall point to some at least of the true Grounds and Reasons for Men's Neglect and Inobservance of the Precepts and Laws of the Gospel: And,

III. I shall close the whole with some Deductions naturally arising from the former Observations.

I. And first: Before I meddle with the little Pleas or Shifts made use of to relax, suspend, or neglect the great Business

S E R M O N XII. 231

finels of Religion, I cannot but premise, that 'tis one of the worst Symptoms of the distemper'd Nature intail'd upon us, that we are so far from being uneasy under it, or looking out for a Cure, that we are rather apt to nurse the Disease, and reject the Remedy. It was the dangerous Vanity of the *Pharisees*, to think themselves so *whole* and sound as *not to need a Physician*; but then it was the desperate Phrenzy of the entire Body almost of the *Jews* to resolve, as it were, against their own Recovery, by flighting the great Salvation tender'd to 'em. And if we look into the State and Condition of Christianity at this Day, we shall find too much occasion to remark that the Religion of *Christ* is a *stumbling Block* to a great Number of its own Professors, as well as it was heretofore to the *Jews* and *Greeks*: And were we to judge by the Strength of Men's Prejudices, and the Coolness of their Practice in reference to the Truths or Precepts of the Gospel, one might be tempted to think the Christian Religion were rather a Plot to be-

232 SERMON XII.

tray Men into Misery and Ruine, than a Contrivance of infinite Wisdom and Mercy to rescue and preserve 'em from it. But since Men are so very shy and backward to the Terms of this new and *heavenly Calling*, it may be of some Use to examine the Pretences which are made for so unaccountable a Conduct.

And the foremost seems to be this, the Strictness and Rigour of the Christian Discipline. This is a grand Objection, and lies ready in the way of those who chuse rather *to stand idle in the Vineyard*, than *to bear the Burthen and Heat of the Day*. 'Tis a common Complaint among those who think it enough to be call'd Christians, that the Gospel is a severe, rigid, and impracticable Institution; that the Laws it enjoins are like the Rites of *Moses* in another respect, a *Burthen*, both for their Weight and Number, *too heavy to be born*; that they lay Restraints upon Nature in her most innocent Enjoyments, and curb her in the Use of her dearest Rights; that they prescribe Rules to the Heart and Thoughts, and oblige
Men

SERMON XII. 233

Men to pull out a right Eye, or cut off a right Hand rather than offend God or hazard their Souls. Then for the Doctrines of Patience and Suffering, of turning the other Cheek, and forgiving Wrongs, even to the number of *seventy times seven*; these are *hard Sayings*, *who can abide 'em*? And those that do not care to improve 'em into practice are apt to ask, as the Disciples did in another Case, *who then can be saved*? Mat. xix. 25. But then do Men in earnest think the Terms of their Happiness so very hard and toilsome? Or are not these rather the poor Excuses, the last Shelter and Reserve of a naughty Heart, a perverse Will, and libertine Principles? Or did those that raised the Objection ever study to remove it by trying as well as asking *what they should do to be saved*? We must not, we cannot deny what our Blessed Lord has so expressly affirm'd, that *strait is the Gate which leads to Life*, and few there be that enter at it; yet the Blame does not lie in Religion but ourselves, for as it enjoins

234 SERMON XII.

joins no Duty but what Right and untainted Reason must approve of, so does it controul no Freedom but a mere Licence to Sin. It sets Bounds indeed to our Lusts and Passions (and so does God to the Sea, lest it should drown the Earth :) But whatever the Gospel enjoins or prohibits has so much intrinsic Good or Evil in it, that to decline or evade any Point of Duty, to break or transgress any one Law of God on the Score of any fancy'd Difficulty annex'd to it, is to quarrel with God for not permitting us to steer our Actions as the Brutes do by the blind Instinct of Appetites and Senses: So that when all the Arguments are drawn together which slothful and licentious Men can borrow from the Hardships and Rigours of the Christian Life, to excuse 'em from the Duties of it, they amount but to this, that they will not accept Salvation upon Terms of God's chusing, but would go to Heaven thro' the broad Way, *i. e.* They would indulge their Vices, and yet not forfeit their Happiness;

SERMON XII. 215

Happiness; which is so gross a Contradiction as to be impossible ev'n for God himself to reconcile: But then a

2. Pretence for the Neglect or Contempt of the Laws of Christianity is the Care, and Business, and Incumbrance of Life. It seems that Mens Wants and Occasions engross and demand so much of their Time and Pains, that if Religion be not serv'd last (and 'tis well if they will allow it any place) their Affairs must suffer, and Interest, and Property (to say nothing of Pleasure and Vanity) must be great Losers: Hence is it that the first and great Law of *doing as we would be done by*, is so often shifted or transgress'd, that Men persuade themselves they must be true to their own Profit, whatever becomes of this great Commandment, *Then shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self*. Hence is it that the Worship of God is so little attended and so slightly perform'd, that there is some Project forming, some great Affair in pursuit which has the same Pretence with the Wedding, or the Purchase in the Parable, to juggle out

236 SERMON XII.

out the very Thoughts of Prayer and Devotion. How frequently has the Plea of worldly Business been urg'd as an Excuse for neglecting the first Duty of the Christian Religion, the Blessed Sacrament? And how apt are we to urge *Martha's Incumbrance* as a very just Bar to *Mary's Care* about the one Thing necessary? Or if the Affairs of the World and our Families must not totally exempt us from the Duties of our Christian Engagement, they serve as a Ground to delay and protract 'em to the last Minute. Thus does the Man of Thrift and Industry resolve to do some great Deed of Charity; but then his Prudence bids him put it off, as *Festus did St. Paul's Plea* 'till *another Season*: and then what wonders of Piety shall be perform'd by his Executors, and how will he cloath the naked and feed the hungry, what Hospitals will he build, and what Captives redeem when he is dead and gone? And do we not use this very reasoning in the great Business of Repentance; to Day we are not at leisure for it, to Morrow

we

SERMON XII. 237

we design well, but the *Exchange* or the Warehouse happen to interpose, and for that time mar a good Resolution, and every Day produces some Let and Incumbrance till we make new Matter for Repentance by delaying so long a Duty so necessary. But then must the Affairs of the other World be attended to the Prejudice of those Interests which are present and sensible? Yes most certainly, when there is any Competition between them, for the Goods of this Life will be a very bad *Exchange for the loss of the Soul*: But why may we not serve God and our selves together? Or why should our Business encroach upon our Duty, when God is truly served in our proper Callings, and we are then doing ourselves most good when we strictly perform our Duties to God and Man? So that to plead the Hurry and Distraction of worldly Affairs in excuse for Irreligion is a double Fallacy; for if the Business be lawful and well tim'd, 'tis a part of our Duty, and if it be otherwise, 'tis directly

238 SERMON XII

directly sinful, and then there will be a Crime in the very Excuse.

I would omit a third Excuse for so backward a Compliance with the Duties of our Christian Calling, had I not heard it more than once us'd in favour of Mens Indifference; and that is, that they are discourag'd by the Sense of their own Frailties, and dare not set about the stricter Duties of Religion for fear they should miscarry in the Attempt. They know and feel themselves *subject to a Law of Sin*, and they have heard, that they that offend in one Point stand charg'd with the Breach of the *whole Law*; and who then is sufficient for these things? But what a wretched kind of Sophistry is this, that because we cannot be as perfect as we would, we will not therefore be as good and virtuous as we can? We cannot reach the Purity of Angels, and therefore we will not endeavour after the Sincerity of Christians. These are but flight and paltry Evasions; and since our sincere Endeavours will advance us forward in our

SERMON XII. 239

our Way to Heaven, it will be no Excuse for losing the Prize that we are afraid to venture upon the Race. In short, *God has call'd us to Holiness*, and since he cannot enjoin us any Thing that is impossible, we may be fully assur'd that what a corrupt Nature cannot effect, a Divine Grace will; and this is enough to put us upon the Trial, or to baffle all our Excuses: in the room of which I proceed in the

II. Place, To assign some at least of the true and real Grounds of Mens Averseness to the Duties of their Christian Engagement; and I shall single out these two as the Chief and Principal:

The First is the want of a vigorous and active Faith; and the other a worldly and sensual Spirit. To take 'em in their Order: We may well pronounce the Evasions and Neglects which Men are so guilty of, to proceed in a great measure from Unbelief; and the weaker Mens Faith is, the more remiss will they be in the Practice or Improvement of any part of Christian Virtue: For as human Nature is now grown too Mercenary

240 SERMON XII.

Mercenary to serve God for nothing, so can nothing sooner induce 'em to a strict and steady Piety, than a firm Persuasion that *there is a Reward for the Righteous*. Now as such a Faith, I mean the settled habit of it, cannot fail of the best Effects upon Mens Lives, so where such Effects do not appear, but Men decline or shift that Christian Task the Gospel has allotted 'em; what other Evidence can they give that they really believe there is a God, and that *Heb. xi. 6. He is a Rewarder of those that seek him?* The Sum of our Christian Engagement consists in two Things, the doing God's Will with Chearfulness, and the suffering it with Patience, and if then we do believe that God can amply repay us for all the Toil and Trouble which attends upon Well-doing, the Cross itself will be no Burden, because we look beyond it to a Crown of Glory. Could *Abraham* have disputed his Maker's Will in any Instance, the Trial he was put upon would have left him more room for Excuse, than any Guest in the Parable could pretend to:

SERMON XII. 241

to: But how then could he have been *the Father of the Faithful*, had he not fully resign'd his Son or himself to God's disposal? But if this good Man could trust God with so dear a Pledge, upon a view of those Attributes and Perfections which he was fully assur'd could never deceive him, will not the same Faith produce an unreserv'd Obedience in all those that are the true Heirs of it. For what but the want of this made all the Disciples forsake their Master in his greatest Danger? And what but the abundance of it carry'd 'em through all Dangers and Torments after the Holy Ghost was shed upon 'em? So that 'tis plainly evident, that in what degree we are perswaded of the Being and Nature of God, and the certainty of a Life to come; in the very same degree shall we be ready to serve and obey God without Scruple or Reserve.

But then a worldly and sensual Spirit is another Cause of Mens shyness and indifference as to Matters of Religion. Their Minds are sunk as it were into Earth and Sense; they are marry'd

R

to

242 . SERMON XII.

to worldly Enjoyments, and the League is too firmly made to be easily dissolv'd. Tell a Man that rolls in Ease and Wealth and Plenty that he must fast, and and give Alms, and watch and pray to get to Heaven, and perhaps he may give you the hearing: But he has learn'd too much of *the Wisdom of this World*, to part, any more than *the rich young Man* in the Gospel, with his Pelf, or his Pleasure; nor will the easier and less expensive Duties of Religion go down with a Person of this earthly Mould. His Thoughts are too loose and dissipated, have rambled too far and contracted too much Dross in the way to fix upon so pure a Thing as Religion; or dwell upon those distant and future Realities, Heaven, Hell, Death and Judgment. Such Sensualists therefore must change their Nature and Principles before they can be reconcil'd to that Will of God which requires 'em to be devout and serious, sober and temperate, just and merciful: In a word, a worldly Spirit will always have some Excuse ready against such mortifying Duties,

S E R M O N XII. 243

Duties, and those that are most inclin-
ed to make 'em, will be easily known
to what Master they belong: I pro-
ceed now from the general Matter of
the Text, to form in the

III. Place, Two or Three practica Conclusions.

And First, Since Men are apt to put
off the Duties of Religion by Delays
or Excuses; does not this speak our
Heart's *deceitful* as well as *desperately*
wicked? For what does this Shyness
mean, but that we will not accept a Co-
venant that breathes nothing but Grace
and Mercy, Peace and Pardon, Benefit
and Advantage to us? And when we
evade or neglect any Christian Duty, do
we not perversely shut ourselves out of
Heaven by rejecting the only appoint-
ed means to bring us thither? Were
not every Law of God design'd to make
us happy, we might evade or break
'em with a less Imputation of Folly and
Ingratitude; but since we are com-
manded to be holy; because *without*
Holiness no Man can see God; since e-
very Duty enjoin'd us is our Honour

R 2

and

244 SERMON XII.

and Privilege now, and shall be our Crown and Reward hereafter; shall we make Excuses to our own Ruin, and stupidly neglect *so great Salvation*? Shall we rather continue wretched by a perverse Choice, than be render'd happy by Divine Grace and Appointment? Had God in lieu of the glorious Offers tender'd to us by the Gospel of his Son requir'd some *great Thing* of us, *should we not have done it*; how much more then when he only *bids us wash and be clean*? Since then every Excuse or Neglect of the Gospel Conditions is a direct Conspiracy against our own Souls; let us be so wise as to accept, and so just to obey 'em, and then we shall be own'd and admitted as fit Guests to the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*.

Once more, if Men are so ready to excuse themselves even from the easiest and lightest part of *Christ's Yoke*, if the most plain, obvious and natural Duties of Religion are undertaken in so shy and cautious, and perform'd in so flight and perfunctory a Manner; how would they fly to their Shifts and Evasions

SERMON XII. 245

sions were they obliged to perform the more severe and rigid part of their Christian Covenant? Were they sent abroad as the Apostles, *as Lambs among Wolves*, and call'd upon to seal the Faith with their Blood; were they summon'd before the Powers of this World, and requir'd to part with Ease and Liberty, Friends and Estate, and Life itself for the sake and evidence of a good Conscience; were it their turn (as it was the Lot of the earliest and best Christians) to pass the fiery Trial of ten Persecutions, how would such hollow Professors prefer Safety to Innocence, and Convenience to Religion? How would they change and wind, dispense and comply, and conclude it better against the Judgment and Wisdom itself, *to obey Man rather than God*? The Church of *Christ* enjoys now her Halcyon-days, and is (God be thanked) more at rest from her Enemies, than when *the Kings of the Earth stood up against her*. But the Duty of bearing the Cross will for ever oblige the Servants of it, nor can we be *Christ's*

246 SERMON XII.

Disciples if we are not ready to lay down our Lives for his sake; but is that Servant like to dye for his Master who will not afford so cheap an Instance of his Love to him to keep the easiest and gentlest of his Commandments? No certainly, he will much sooner fly to *Naaman's Policy*, *Lord pardon thy Servant in this Thing*, than ever give so costly a Proof that he believes these Words of our Saviour, *Mat. x. 39. He that loses his Life for my sake shall find it.*

But to conclude, If we are ready to evade and neglect the Duties of our Calling, with what Face or Pretence can we expect the Rewards annex'd to 'em? And yet there is no Man but has Presumption enough to hope for Heaven and Happiness, tho' he has loitered in the Market-place, spent his Talent, and is in every respect *an unprofitable Servant*: But let us not deceive ourselves, for *as we have sown so shall we reap*, and God shall give every Man according to his Works. As therefore he will not forget our *Labour of Love*, and
 Patience

SERMON XII. 247

Patience of Hope, so neither will he allot us the Crown and Prize of Obedience for doing the *Work of the Lord negligently*. But then, since he that only cries *Lord, Lord, shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*, let us secure our Title by a real Holiness and unreserv'd Submission to the Will of God; and then we have an infallible Warrant that being steadfast and unmoveable always abounding, *Eccl. i Cor. xv. 58.*



R 4 SERMON



S E R M O N XIII.

The Dissolution of the World, an
Argument for the strictest Ho-
liness.



2 P E T. iii. 11.

*Seeing then that all these things shall
be dissolv'd, what manner of Per-
sons ought ye to be in all holy Con-
versation and Godliness!*



*THE last Times, or the latter
Days, are Terms of so wide
and various a meaning, that
they have been differently,
and yet justly applied to Periods, at a great,
or very uncertain distance from one a-
nother,*

SERMON XIII. 249

nother, in respect, we may conceive of the Course and Decline of any one State or Scene of Things, or the near Approach of any new or successive Dispensation. Thus have those great *Epocha's*, the Promulgation of the Gospel, the Excision of the *Jewish* State, and the Catastrophe of the World itself been pointed to under the general and indistinct Images of the End or Dissolution of Time and of all things. We are led, indeed, by the Drift and Scope of the Places, where these Expressions occur to assign 'em to their proper Periods, rather than by the pompous Phrases in use among the *Jews*; yet was the Ruin of this great and lasting State design'd for so near an Emblem of the last and general Dissolution, that the Holy Spirit seem'd, under so great a Likeness of Description, to serve the same Ends of Piety, from a double Motive, the temporal Judgment reserv'd for the City and Temple of *Jerusalem*, and the eternal Judgment of a future World. But however some Passages may admit of this double Aspect, that

250 SERMON XIII.

that of the Text seems to look so very favourably upon a literal Sense, that it may seem strange some few learned Men have excluded it from that Privilege, contrary to the Stream of so many Writers, the excellent Use which is to be made of the Doctrine, and the most genuine and unforc'd Sense of the whole Chapter. For the Words now read are a serious Application of a very weighty and concerning Truth, the Dissolution of this great System of created Things; an Event, which, how long soever God might please to defer upon the Motives offer'd by his Wisdom and Mercy, 'twas fit that the Faithful should always stand prepar'd for; and therefore the Apostle tells 'em that there would spring up a Set of atheistical *Scoffers*, who would oppose this great Truth (the Change and Renovation of Nature) from the fix'd State and permanent Face of Things, *from the beginning of the Creation*. This was a very false Surmize, and therefore a very weak Pretence for that Challenge at the fourth Verse, *Where is the Promise of his coming?*
 And

SERMON XXI. 251

And the Apostle has very fully refuted the one and answer'd the other, by observing, that the Earth has undergone one great Change *by Water*, and is reserv'd for another *by Fire*. Now let this happen as late as it will, according to the Dates of Time, by which Men compute; yet can it no way affect the Veracity of God, who knows no such Measure, but with whom a *thousand Years are as one Day*. So that if the *Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise*, there is very good room for this Inference in the Verse following, *Seeing then all these things shall be dissolv'd, &c.* In order to the clearer handling of this Passage, I shall examine it under the following Heads.

I. I shall enquire into the Truth and Manner of that Dissolution which this Passage assigns to the Universe.

II. I shall urge it (according to the Design of the Text) as a most persuasive Argument for the strictest Holiness in Life and Conversation.

III. I shall examine and refute those Grounds upon which too many presume
(notwith-

252 SERMON XIII.

(notwithstanding so great an Inducement to the contrary) to lead very unholy and careless Lives. And,

I. As to the Dissolution of the World and the things in it: 'Tis a Point so largely and fully made out in Scripture, that it appears little less obvious to Reason, than evident to Faith: So that were there any room for Caviel, it must respect the bare Mode and Circumstance, not the Reality of this future Event. Now we are taught to apprehend this dissolv'd State of Things, rather under the Notion of a Change, than a full and entire Ruine: For it will not amount to such a Cessation of Being, as a mere Nothing imports, as if the Universe, or the least part of it, were not to exist under any Form; but implies only such a Dis-union of all the Parts of its present Frame, that it will no longer remain the same System. When the whole Compages is thus dissolv'd, the Loss of Figure is so far from supposing Loss of Being, that it is requisite to make way for a new and better Face of Things; and in this Sense the Apostle

SERMON XIII. 253

He affirms, that *we look for new Heavens and a new Earth*. This is the Enlargement which *the Creatures* expect from *the Bondage of Corruption*, that very Παλιγγενεσία, that renew'd and glorious Face of Nature so much and well discours'd of by *Seneca*, and the Sect of *Stoicks*. And as the Scheme or *Fashion of the World* shall thus *pass away*, so will this great Renovation be effected by Fire; for the Earth shall be burnt up, and the Elements dissolv'd with *fervent Heat*, i. e. the Stars and Planets, (say some) with the very Element of Fire itself, as well as the lower Region of the Air, shall undergo this ordeal Trial, and be refin'd and purg'd into a new and better State. Nor does this future Conflagration subsist upon a few, and those doubtful or obscure Texts, but has been the Subject of a very early and spreading Tradition; and the Destruction of *Sodom* was so expressive a Type of this fiery Crisis, that our Saviour himself was pleas'd to refer to it as a most lively and dreadful Resemblance of that flaming Fire where-

in

254 SERMON XIII.

in he shall come to judge the World. But neither is it merely a Point of Faith, that the World shall thus far perish and have an end; but it were absurd even to Reason to suppose the contrary, for Material and Eternal are Terms that can never agree: And however it may please God to sustain by his Power a single Atome from sinking into nothing; yet Creation itself implies Change and Succession, and every thing in it is in such a constant Flux and Motion that the World may be said to die by piece-meal, and Time itself to be hastening to its Grave, the Abyss, I mean of a boundless Eternity. Indeed the gradual Waste or Decay of so large and compounded a Mass as the World is cannot be exactly perceiv'd; but we do not want good Proofs that every part of it is impair'd, down from the Sun's Heat to the Age and Strength of Men and other Creatures, and even the Virtue in Plants, and the Earth that bears them.

Besides which, we have a farther Ground from Experience itself to expect

SERMON XIII. 255

pect a new Period, or some farther Change in respect to this Globe of the Earth and Heavens, when there has been one great Change by a Deluge already, that might certainly pass for a Dissolution of the Face and Figure at least of the old World. And tho' we have the Divine Promise that it shall not be destroy'd again *by the Waters of a Flood*, yet that was both an Earnest of what God's Power can do, and a Pledge of what he will do in the next great and general Alteration. At what time this shall happen is a Secret to Men and Angels, and the Signs that precede it are rather Marks of Caution, than Direction; but still we may conceive that since so great a Change is to be wrought; since *the very Elements shall melt, and there shall be a Sea of Glass mingled with Fire*; there will be some previous Dispositions (according to the course of Nature and Providence) to ripen and produce this great Event: So that whether it shall be owing to the nearer approach of the Sun to the Earth, an Eruption of the central Fire, the Fury of burning Mountains,

or

256 SERMON XIII.

or the Concurrence of all these Causes, yet some way shall the Earth and the Works thereof be burnt up; and this is so very affecting a Consideration as will not allow me to suspend any longer what I have to offer under my

II. General Head, The shewing this to be a very forcible Argument for the strictest Holiness of Life and Conversation: And it must, I think, appear to be so, in respect of itself, as it implies a Change of State in regard of many awful Circumstances appendent to it, and as it is a most fix'd and certain Event: To resume these Heads of Argument.

The final Period of the World seems to bespeak a very strict and exemplary Sanctity; as it barely implies a great Change, the opening a new State of Things, and the shifting of a Scene with which we are acquainted, for an unknown because invisible World. *We walk now by Faith and not by Sight;* and this were reason enough why we should *pass the time of our sojourning here in fear;* but whatever State we shall change into since all the Creatures
are

SERMON XIII. 257

are made subject to Vanity, and Man, the Lord of 'em, may justly use the good Patriarch's Complaint, *Few and evil are the Days of my Pilgrimage.* Human as well as Christian Prudence instructs us to manage the Functions of so short a Life with all the Diligence, and taste the Pleasures of it with all the indifference of Persons who have here no abiding City; for since the World is so variable a Theatre, and those that move on it must disappear like a Dream, or a Shadow; the Hand of Providence which assign'd them their Parts, and the Eye that watch'd 'em thro' the whole Conduct, will certainly demand how well or ill they have acted under these borrow'd Characters, *i. e.* whether they have liv'd up to the Order, the Dignity, and the End of their Beings, and behav'd themselves soberly, righteously and godly in this present World; for present it may be well call'd, not only as a new and better State is to succeed it, but as God intended it merely for one of Trial and Probation. We are placed on Earth, that we may become the fit-

258 SERMON XIII.

ter Candidates for Heaven, and as God made Man for himself, *i. e.* to praise and honour him, so he made the World for Man, in this Sense only, that *by using it so as not to abuse it*, he might conspire with all the Creatures, tho' in a nobler manner, to glorify their common Lord. So that 'tis a very preposterous use of Life, consider'd as a short Passage thro' a changeable World, to eat and drink with *S. Paul's* Epicure when we shoud be doing our Business and preparing for our Remove; and as gross a Mistake is it to suppose that whilst we are hastening away, and the Earth and Heavens after us, we should be disposed into this Element, as the *Leviathan* was into the Waters, purely to *take our Pastime therein*.

But then if the End of all Things (merely as 'tis a Change) demands from us the strictest Holiness, the Motive grows stronger as this Change imports the entire Pomp and Solemnity of a future Judgment. For tho' this great Trial shall precede that End or Consummation, *When Christ shall have delivered*

SERMON XIII. 259

livered up the Kingdom to God even the Father; yet both Events fall under such a Parity of Description, as to the time and manner, the Agents and the Instruments that we may regard 'em as one entire Scene, and that so very August as may well prevail on us to work out our Salvation with fear and trembling. For can a Man be so stupid to proceed in subverting the Laws of God and Nature, and yet reflect that God is now hastening the Change of it, and that the Elements by which we now breathe and live shall hereafter minister to the Perdition of ungodly Men? Yet thus it must be when the World expires, and in order to it Christ his Blessed Son, to whom this Judgment is reserv'd, shall descend from Heaven in a most dreadful Pomp with the sound of a Trump and the Voice of an Archangel, whilst the other ministering Spirits shall gather his Elect from the four Winds, and the Judge himself separate the Sheep from the Goats. I need not mention after this the Horror and Surprize of so sudden a Sum-

S 2 mons,

260 SERMON XIII.

mons, but since the Alarm shall be so loud, that *all that are in the Grave shall hear it*, and the approach as silent as that of a *Thief in the Night*; we shall be in a much worse State than our Lord's slumbering Disciples, if we do not *watch when we thus know not the Hour*.

However the Event itself is fix'd and certain, and that is another Ground both for Piety and Caution. Tho' we cannot tell how long the World may last, yet we do know that it shall not last for ever. It had once a beginning, and that is a reason why it must have an End, and tho' there may be many Causes assign'd why we are not able to calculate upon the last Age and Period of the World from any thing, or all things which have happen'd since its Nativity; yet the Date is seal'd in the Divine Decree, and we may affirm there is *an appointed time* for the Earth itself, as well as *to Man* upon it. Hitherto it has been sustain'd by that Law that brought it into Being, and since it requires but a second *fiat* to renew the
Face

[SERMON XIII. 261

Face of the Earth, and God has determin'd the Event which is therefore future only to us, and not him, it is a very forcible Motive to holy Living, that this Issue of Things is so immutably fix'd, that it can no more be reversed than the general Law of Mortality upon all Mankind: Besides that the Evidence of this great Truth is so bright and strong to us that are concern'd in it, that we cannot borrow the least pretence for Sin and Sloth from the want of a fair Warning, or a due Discovery. Indeed the most distant Glimpse, or probable Appearance of so important a Change, would oblige us to secure so costly a Venture as our Souls at the price of all those Austerities which Men can fancy in Religion; but as we are assured from the Book of God, and his own Witness in our Hearts, that *all these Things shall be dissolv'd*; let me once more demand with the Apostle, *What manner of Persons, &c.* But since there are some Obstacles in the way of so necessary a Practice, which seem to owe their Rise to the different Sources

of Heedlessness, Prejudice or Unbelief, I shall endeavour in the

III. And last Place, To obviate these Mistakes by applying myself to examine each of them singly and apart. And,

I. I observe that the Careless and Unthinking lose the Benefit of this important Doctrine, not only for want of presenting it oftner to their Thoughts, but by mistaking the Case, and putting the evil Day (for so it becomes thro' our own Faults) much farther from them than it is. There are no Arts how deceitful soever, but Men will use to get rid of the Sense of Religion and another World; and since this Sense will not easily be extinguish'd, they will either suffer it to languish for want of Employment, or else corrupt it by presuming that they are good enough already, or that they shall be so before their Account is call'd for. Repentance is a dark gloomy and irksome Duty (much the more so doubtless the longer 'tis delay'd;) and if a little Sorrow, good Thoughts, and grave Purposes are the main Ingredients in it, these (they imagine)

SERMON XIII. 263

gine) may be discharged at any time when the sprightly part of Life is over: So when Nature and Sense are glutted, Religion may be serv'd with most Ease and least Cost. Men do not deny all this while but that the Heavens and Earth shall pass away, and that there is *a Judge of the Quick and Dead*: But they vainly suppose that the End will not be yet, that the *Lord will delay his coming*, and that the last Hour will not approach, nor *the Door be shut* before they have *bought their Oil, and trimm'd their Lamps*. But now is not the World at an End, with respect to us, when we are summon'd to leave it? And tho' we may not in either Case know the Hour, are not our own Funerals the same with that of the Universe itself in regard to the great Concerns of a Life to come? What matter then whether the World, or our selves are first changed; whether the Elements be dissolv'd themselves, or we be first dissolv'd into 'em; whether we be found (at this great Period) among those *that live, or those that sleep*. The time of the Change is

S. 4

altogether

264 SERMON XIII.

altogether uncertain, and that makes the Duty of Repentance always necessary: For since Time and Grace are both God's, and not one Minute is our own, and this very Minute may be the last, 'tis a very dangerous Presumption to neglect or delay that which must be done to that Period which may never come; or if it does, may deceive or upbraid us, by finding us still unprepared to employ it. But,

2. There is another Mistake which has too far prevail'd, and 'tis this, that whenever Judgment begins, or the World expires, there is some middle State wherein the Sins Men carry out of this Life, shall some way or other be aton'd, and from whence the Souls that committed 'em shall be releas'd, *when the Times of Refreshing shall come from the Presence of the Lord.* This is that purging Fire which has brought so much Gain to a Church which can (it seems) kindle and quench it as it pleases; and 'tis a Doctrine moreover so indulgent to Men's Sins, that too few do really and heartily believe, that when their Days are gone their Dooms are seal'd. Tho' nothing

SERMON XIII. 265

nothing can be more express than these Words (*after Death the Judgment;*) yet those that have liv'd at a careless rate, and either not made up their Accounts, or done it in the Tumult and Agonies of a Death-bed, are loath to think that when their Breath has left 'em, their Case is past Remedy: Or if they cannot flatter their Thoughts with any new or second State of Probation, they will still feed their hopes, that some way may be found for their Escape from the Horrors of the next World, as well as the Temptations of this; that in so wide an Interim, God may please to recede from the Rigours of his Covenant; that Time may quell (as some have vainly dreamt) the Rage of the bottomless Pit, or an infinite Justice be appeas'd by a finite Measure of Punishment. But these are weak and sinful Surmizes, and have nothing to support 'em but the Lusts and the Wilhes of the Loose and the Profligate; so that if they do not receive a full Answer from this Apothegm of the Wise Man, *Where the Tree falls, there it lies*, they can never make one
to

266. SERMON XII.

to this Assertion, *That the Wicked shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord.* But I am to conclude,

3. With a word or two to those, who either entertain none, or a very wavering and doubtful Belief of a State to come. That there are such, is a very sad Truth: And tho' I have the Comfort to be now applying to Persons *who have better learnt Christ, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come*; it cannot be out of season to warn you against that Error, which has persuaded so many, that they shall die like Brutes, and not even then rise when the *Heavens are no more*. To be nothing, tho' it may be better than to be miserable, yet is the very last and the worst Refuge Men can chuse. For as that Mind must be very corrupt that cannot bear the Thought of its own Existence, so must it be very narrow to admit so mean a Wish, as that it may cease to be. But because it is both wicked and unreasonable, it will never be granted: For that Being who
made

SERMON XIII. 267

made us for his Glory, cannot be pre-
sum'd to serve that End by our Annihila-
tion. Wherefore let us endeavour to
live and die to God now, that we may
live for ever with him hereafter: Let
us so prepare for the End of all things,
that *when the Son of Man cometh, he*
may find Faith upon the Earth; and
may we be so ready to meet the blessed
Bridegroom, that he may not exclude us
for want of a Wedding Garment, but
greet and receive us with a, *Well*
done, &c.



SERMON



S E R M O N XIV.

The Duty and Excellence of forgiving Wrongs.



LUKE VI. 37.

Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.



CHARITY stands foremost in the List of Christian Graces, because it is a Principle which gives Life and Vigour to all the rest; so is there no Act or Branch of Charity so truly excellent, as that by which we are dispos'd to pity and pardon

SERMON XIV. 269

don the Errors of other Men. The first of these two Sentiments is the Foundation of the other, and it hath so deep a Root in our Make and Frame, that it would be very hard, if possible, to divest our selves so entirely of it, as to remain indolent under those Evils, whether of Sin or Suffering, to which our own Nature stands expos'd in that of others. And whenever Men have discarded these friendly Affections, 'tis a certain Sign that they have taken pains to spoil and pervert a good Nature. There is, I confess, a very wide difference between the Actions (and perhaps the Motives) of doing good, and suffering wrong; and we find in fact, that many Persons who want no Spur to the most liberal Bounty, and are most ready to melt at the Sight of a poor or any way distress'd and wretched Object, can yet spare none of their Charity in cancelling an Injury, or remitting a Trespass against their Persons or Property. Thus Charity seems to be divided against itself, and knows better how to be kind, than to suffer long, and

endure

endure all things. But the Truth is, that wherever this Principle is right, 'tis uniform likewise; and as he that gives an Alms for God's sake, will forgive a Wrong too, upon the same Motive; so when Men perform one Branch of this Duty and neglect the other, they are acted by some false Spring which either mars or alters it. Thus Pride or Self-love will put us upon doing good, when we do not thereby cross upon any other Sentiment; but to forgive freely is the best and truest Proof of Self-denial; and he that pardons an Enemy from his Heart, is arriv'd at so blessed an Habit of Mind, as shews him to have well digested this short Rule of our Saviour, *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.* I shall improve this plain and useful Direction under the following Particulars.

I. I shall shew the Nature and Extent of the Duty here enjoin'd, of forgiving Wrongs and Offences.

II. I shall represent the great Reasonableness, as well as particular Excellence of this Branch of Charity.

III. I

SERMON XIV. 271

III. I shall enforce the special Motive here made use of to promote it, that if we forgive others, we shall likewise be forgiven. And,

I. As for that Act of Good-will by which we remit and pardon any Treipass against us. We shall best take its general Idea from the same Act of Mercy and Goodness which God is pleas'd to exercise towards us: For as Forgiveness has so much of the Nature of God in it, we cannot borrow so divine a Resemblance from any other Original. Now Pardon or Forgiveness, when applied to God, imports such a free and total Discharge of the Offence, as to restore the Offender to the same State of Favour or Advantage he had quitted by it: And tho' this may not be a full and adequate Notion, yet we find it more frequently describ'd by these genuine Fruits or Signs, that it *covers or blots out*, that it *forgets and cancels the Sins of Men*. And thus far the Pardon granted us by God, will be a fit Pattern for that we are to exert towards one another: For however the same Acts may vary in regard

272 SERMON XIV.

gard of several Subjects, they agree in this, that no Man can be said to forgive his Enemy, who does not do it freely and fully; and this seems to imply the following Advances towards a perfect Reconciliation, that we dismiss the least Motion of Rancour and Ill-will, that we harbour towards him the contrary Propensions of Candour and Mildness, and that we express these Sentiments by suitable Actions.

The first Mark here offer'd, is indeed the very lowest Degree of the Duty requir'd, and such a Symptom only of forgiving Charity as speaks it to be alive: For till the Spirit of Revenge is quite banish'd, there will be no room for those healing Sentiments which tend to the Re-union. If there remains any Root of Bitterness, any Degree of Rancour and Resentment, when we have once profess'd to forgive an ill Turn, the next and the smallest Occasion will improve it into Hostility: So that next to the steeling our Minds against the Sense of an Injury, the readiest way to attain the Art of forgiving, is to efface the

S E R M O N XIV. 273

the Traces of it as fast as we can, and not suffer the Impression to wear too deep into our Spirits. 'Tis a Distinction pretty frequent in Men's Mouths, that *they can forgive, but not forget*; tho' it seems either to have no Meaning, or a very ill one: For if it intends only that it is not in Men's Power to lose the very Sense and Remembrance of a bad or ungrateful Office, it may be true indeed; but then 'tis no part of their Duty. But if Men pretend to forgive, and yet do not dismiss any uneasy or regretting Thoughts, as fast as they return, they do not certainly forget, so far as they can. And in this Case their Heart will appear so much the worse as their Memory is the better. To think much and often upon a Wrong, or the Person that did it, can leave no good Relish upon the Mind; but then no one can be said to pardon a Wrong, who still retains so keen and pungent a Sense of it: For this by degrees will nourish Malice, and that will produce Revenge. So that in order to forgive like a Christian, we must so far study the Art of

T

Oblivion,

174 SERMON XIV.

Oblivion, as to harbour as seldom, and banish as soon as we can, the very Thought of any Offence committed against us.

But the next Step towards the Perfection of this Duty, is to entertain mild and amicable Thoughts towards those who have injur'd or deserv'd ill from us: And if this be a more difficult, 'tis so much a more noble and genuine Mark of a forgiving Spirit. Not to wish or intend Evil, where we have receiv'd it, is an happy Restraint of Temper and Passion; but 'tis a very imperfect Idea of Charity, that it does not hurt or destroy, or *return Evil for Evil*. This certainly is a Grace of a wider Compass than the Philosopher's Maxim, *Bear and forbear*; and he that loves his Brother so well as to pardon his Failings, will harbour all Thoughts of Kindness and Compassion towards him, and act by the freest Measures of Candour and Benevolence.

Now when we are so truly merciful as to return Acts of Favour and Kindness for Instances of Wrong or Violence, then do we give the last and best

Proof,

SERMON XIV. 275

Proof, that we know how to forgive as we ought: Nor can we, indeed, commence merciful upon any lower or other Terms. For to do good where we can, is the direct Fruit of wishing well; and because the Temper of the Mind appears best in the Actions which flow from it, the Apostle demands this real Proof of our Mercy, that *if our Enemy hunger, we feed him; and if he thirst, that we give him Drink.* Nor is there any fear that so generous a Compassion will expose us to new Affronts, (an Objection rais'd by those who had rather retaliate than remit;) for it would be an Effect something strange, that Candour and Meekness should invite the Returns of Hatred and Ill-will, or that the Man to whom I have forgiven fifty Talents, should, for that very reason, rob me of an hundred. But supposing the worst: A Man's Charity does not oblige him to banish, but preserve his Prudence; so that he may do all the Good he can wish, and yet keep out of harm's way. Upon the whole then, we have secur'd the Duty,

humbly

T 2

and

276 SERMON XIV.

and shall reap the Reward of Forgiving, when we no longer consider those as Enemies, who have done us hurt, but are ready to pay 'em all the Dues of Religion and Humanity: For even whilst we are bid to *do good to those that despitefully use us*, we are no more oblig'd to wear an Enemy in our Bosoms than a Viper, especially when we are assur'd he will sting or poison us. But this being a Duty that rather wants to be inculcated than explain'd, I now advance under my

II. Head, To represent the great Reasonableness, as well as Excellence of it: And the former might be fully evinc'd (had we no other Arguments) from the Justice and Prudence that seem to attend it.

For if Man be consider'd in his common Nature, in that Root and Origin, which is the Ground of a most diffusive and universal Relation, every Man will be found (upon the Maxims of common Equity) to have a Title to all those Benefits from others (be they what they will) which he may want or demand

SERMON XIV. 277

demand in his own Turn. 'Tis certain that no Man is born purely for himself, but that Providence has plac'd us here to serve God by a good Life, and one another by a mutual Interchange of kind and friendly Offices. And because this Community of good Offices is founded in the Parity of our common Nature, it is advanc'd from a Rule of Reason into a Precept of Religion, that *we should do to others, as we desire they should do to us.* And surely this Rule will extend to Men's Souls as well as Bodies, and include the Pardon of their moral Failings as well as the Relief of their personal Distresses. For since in many things we offend all, and no Man is exempted from Error and Frailty, there are like to happen as many (if not more) Occasions for that Mercy which disposes us to forgive, as for those *Bowels of Compassion* which prompt us to distribute; and if so, it will be an equal Justice to pardon a Wrong as to dispense a Boon, and the same Motives will serve in either Case, *i. e.* barely to remember *that we our selves are also in the Body.*

278 SERMON XIV.

Nor does there need any other Reflection, to speak it an Act of Prudence likewise, to pardon and forgive: For tho' some may do more than others to mend a bad Nature; yet as Men we are *subject to the like Passions*, and 'tis the Excess of these Passions which makes room for all the Mercy and Pity we have to bestow. We do not perhaps offend all the same way, but we all do so in one way or other. And since it so often happens that we abuse God and wrong our Brother by one and the same Sin, is it not a Part of human as well as Christian Wisdom to compound with one another for so reciprocal a Debt, and make those Abatements to our Brother's Weakness which we shall so certainly want for our own? We may perhaps be so lucky, as not to transgress thro' Pride or Disdain; but then we may err thro' Passion and Frowardness; and he that does not wrong another with a form'd Intention, may do so by Neglect, or for want of due Measures of Caution or Reserve. It may be one Man's Misfortune to offend with his Tongue, when
he

he wears no Malice in his Heart; another may do an ill Turn in the Heat of Blood, and repent of it the next Minute; a third may be misled or betray'd into that, which in calmer Thoughts he would neither act nor approve; and every Man, even the best among us, is liable to so many Miscarriages, that whoever *thinks he stands ought not only to take heed lest he fall*, but lend a charitable Hand to recover those that are falling, and to lift up those that are down: For besides that Reason and Prudence require this,

It is moreover a most divine and excellent Property to pardon and forgive; 'tis so in the very Nature of the thing, as well as on the Score of that pure Law which enjoins, and that great Example which recommends it.

If we consider the Power of Self-love, the Proneness of Nature to Revenge, and the Opinions or Customs of the World about it, it will appear to be the best and noblest Conquest of our selves, and argue a particular Force and Greatness of Mind. He that is most sensible

280 SERMON XIV.

of an Injury, is so far the Author of his own Pain, as he lies more open to it, and encreases it by his own Softness; whereas to forgive an Offence, is to get above it, to overcome by Patience, and make an Enemy drop his Weapon. And is it not the bravest Courage to endure like a Christian, what others impose on us through Weakness or Phrenzy? All Wrongs are, in the Nature of 'em, real Mistakes; and he that studies Reprisals to an ill Turn, does but second his Neighbour's Sin and Folly by a greater degree of both. And besides that Revenge is wicked and brutish; it is a Mark of the meanest Spirit, and may be acted (or something very like it) by a Wolf or a Tyger; so that we shall do our Nature as well as Religion the greater Honour, the more we shun and abhor so inhuman a Quality.

But the Duty of forgiving is farther ennobled, as well as enforc'd by being made the Matter of an express Law. With this View *Moses* advanc'd this excellent Rule, *Thou shalt not hate thy Brother*

SERMON XIV. 281

Brother in thine Heart: But our Divine Law-giver speaks with greater Compass as well as Authority, *I say unto you love your Enemies;* and to shew that this Love must extend to the pardon of Wrongs and Offences, the same Blessed Master commands us to forgive *to seventy times seven*, and not to presume to make our Oblations to God, till we are *agreed with our Enemy, and reconciled to our Brother.* But shou'd we be so rash to approach the Throne of Grace, or the God of Mercy with malice in our Hearts, our Prayer becomes both an Evidence and Curse against us, for we *ask Forgiveness of our Trespases, as we forgive those that trespass against us.*

But to render this Virtue still more worthy of Imitation, 'tis transmitted to us from the brightest Example as well as the purest Institution. Our Blessed Saviour did not only preach but practise it, and that in the highest degree, and upon every Occasion; and he met with as many Occasions as the Malice or Blindness of an obstinate People could throw

282 SERMON XIV.

throw in his way; for they contemn'd both his Person and Mission, call'd him *Belzebub*, betray'd, condemn'd and put him to Death: And yet we find this Character of his Meekness, that *when he was reviled, he reviled not again*, but granted his own, and begg'd God's Pardon for his Enemies in this most compassionate Form, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*. Having laid before you the Influence of so Divine an Example, it may the better introduce what I am briefly to offer in the

III. And last Place, *viz.* An Enforcement of the Motive here us'd, that if we forgive others God will forgive us. Now this must needs prove a very forcible Motive, whether we consider this Benefit in itself, or compar'd with that Pardon or Forgiveness which passes between Man and Man.

The Pardon vouchsafed by God to Man, presented in the most general and abstracted View, includes a free and full Release from the Demerits of Sin, so free that there neither was nor could be
any

SERMON XIV. 283

any Motive to it, but the pure Mercies of God in *Christ*, and so full and compleat withal, that it was sign'd and made over to us by an expresse and formal Act of Grace. A very merciful as well as extensive Grant! for as Sin is a *Trespasse of God's Law*, so the *Wages of Sin is Death*, and this Wages assign'd by that *Divine Wrath* which the Prophet calls a *consuming Fire*: But if this was the Penalty, from this has the Mercy of God discharg'd Mankind, and that not only so far, that *Death has no more Dominion over them*; but that they are hereby asserted into the Hopes and Joys of an endless Life. Thus does God not only remit our Sins, but improve our State, and by a foretaste of Heaven and Happiness give us an Earnest of the Fulness of our Pardon; nor can any thing interpose to deprive us of this Grace, but our own Abuse or Contempt of it, for God will not cancel his Covenant, nor *can he deny himself*. But then if the Forgiveness granted from God to Man implies so large and blessed a Privilege, and since the *Gifts and Calling of God*

nommod

are

284 SERMON XIV.

are without Repentance; the Inference is as ready as the Precept itself is clear and exprefs, Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful.

But lest we should still be slack in applying so excellent a Rule, God's pardoning Grace may be farther consider'd by way of Comparison. And here the difference will appear most amazingly great between human Charity and divine Mercy; for as this latter is truly infinite, so does it freely pardon us such a multitude of Sins as nothing can exceed, but the multitude of those Mercies by which they are pardon'd. Now as bad as Men are to one another, yet their Nature and their Passions are so limited, that there cannot but happen very frequent occasions of Wrong and Injury from the same to the same Persons; for *tho' Offences must needs come*, there is a very wide World to share em, and this kind of Arrows seldom stick long in the same Mark. So that this is a Case which seems only to require a mutual Forbearance under a
common

SERMON XIV. 285

common Suffering. But the Goodness of God is most frequently abus'd, not by one or a few, but by every Man that breathes, so that if God be so *patient* towards us as *to be provoked every Day*, and yet in the *midst of Wrath remember Mercy*; Permit me to argue with the Apostle, Brethren, *if God so loved us, ought not we also to love one another?* Especially when our Offences towards God are not only numberless, but most flagrant and outrageous, for no Sin can possibly be small in respect either of the Law or the Being against which 'tis committed. Tho' no Act of ours can really hurt God, whose Nature is impassible, yet every Sin is a Violation of his Sovereignty; and the Divine Will being the Standard of true and just, every Trespas against that implies a desire at least, that (if it were possible) they might not exist even in God himself. But whatever Evils we do or can inflict on one another are in Comparison but light and transient; for either we deserve 'em, or Time will remove, and Patience help us to cure
or

286 SERMON XIV.

or forget them in earnest. God is first injur'd in all the Wrongs we complain of; and he that assaults his Brother in his Life, Credit, or Fortune, uses him but as an Instrument in breaking one or more of God's Laws; and if our common Lord is so ready to remit so large a Debt, shall we not deserve the Fate in the Parable, if for the sake of a few Pence we so severely treat *our Fellow Servants*?

For besides what has been observ'd, I may subjoin this brief Remark in the last Place; That Men consider'd in a single and private Capacity have no right to inflict any Act of Vengeance or Punishment. 'Tis true, that Self-love both instructs and warrants 'em to defend and preserve themselves; but to redress in their own way, and at their own pleasure the Wrongs and Grievances they may happen to suffer, cannot consist with the make of a Creature so frail and partial as Man is, so prone to offend himself, and so ready to aggravate the Failings and Offences of others. Were the Passions of Men to be
the

SERMON XIV. 287

the Standard of punishing ; what an Acceldama, or Field of Blood, would the World be? So that God has finally reserv'd this Prerogative to himself, for *Vengeance is mine saith the Lord, and I will repay it.* And tho' he has made over somewhat of this Sovereign Right to those that himself styles Gods, I mean his Vicegerents on Earth, yet all *Iniquity* is to be tried and prov'd before 'tis *punish'd by the Judge*; and there is no Power left to the Lusts and Humours of private Men to avenge the petty or the fancy'd Injuries they may sustain. Upon the whole then, let us not *avenge ourselves, but give place into Wrath.* For besides that, if we *wait on the Lord he will repay*, and the Day is coming when all Wrongs shall be redress'd: This one Assertion might serve to silence the Voice of hatred and Revenge, that *if we forgive not our Brother his Trespases, neither will our heavenly Father forgive ours.*

SERMON



S E R M O N XV.

The Dury and Advantage of Religious Meditations.



PSALM iv. 4.

Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own Heart upon your Bed and be still.



IS the great Blessing and Privilege of Man that he can think and reason, reflect and meditate, and receive Pleasure and Advantage from the Objects without, and the Sensations within him. We are beholden indeed to

SERMON XV. 289

Sense for our first Perceptions, and we cannot converse long or much in the World: But 'tis for this Purpose God has bestow'd a Mind upon us, that we should not only move forward (with a prone and brutish Instinct) to the Things before us, and measure the Worth or Happiness of our Beings by the little Gratifications of the mere Animal Life; but that we should retire often from the greater into the lesser World our own Minds, and study to redress at Home that moral Confusion and Disorder, of which we see so natural and clear an Emblem in the Course and Conduct of worldly Things. 'Tis a mere waste and abuse of Life to stick in the Surface of Shews and Appearances, and a gross Indignity to our Reason and our Maker, to let one Dispensation of Nature, Grace or Providence slide by us like a mere Phantasm, or a borrow'd Figure upon the Stage. There is nothing does nor can happen in the World: but what God design'd we should be someway or other the better for; but then the way to be so is by

U

Thought

286 SERMON XV.

Thought or Recollection, for our Senses are but mere passive Things, and 'tis the Soul alone that can so sort and range, unite or divide the Ideas and Notices receiv'd from thence as to make 'em serviceable to the Ends of this Life, or the Interests of another: And even where our mental Views are clearest and strongest, we must not expect to receive either that Pleasure, or Profit from the first and direct Motion, as from the reflex Act of our Minds. For here the Soul seems to act more by herself upon the Stock of her own Abstractions, and much freer from the Impressions of Sense, or the Impulses either of Passion or Fancy. 'Tis of these cooler and calmer debates with our own Minds that the Royal Prophet speaks in this place; and he had practised them himself so often, and to so good Purpose that he thought fit to record these Words as a very useful piece of Advice to all that should come after him: *Stand in awe and sin not; commune with your own Heart upon your Bed and be still.* The Words in their full

SERMON XV. 291

full intent and purport will be best consider'd under the following Heads of Observation;

I. I shall lay before you in as small a compass as I can, the Nature and more immediate Requisites of religious Meditation.

II. I shall shew among other Advantages the special tendency of it, to inspire our Hearts with such an awful Dread, that we shall not dare to sin against God: And,

III. I shall point to some concerning Heads of Meditation, which may be the most likely to excite and cherish this holy Fear in us: And,

I. For the nature of that Action which is here made the Matter of a Precept. The Scope of the entire Psalm, the Temper with which it seems to be penn'd, and the general Piety of the Author, declare it plainly to be of a religious Kind; *i. e.* such a moral and practical Conference with our own Hearts, as might serve to make us love and fear God more, know ourselves better, and in the end prove fruitful to all the Purposes.

202 SERMON XV.

of a good and holy Life. To muse or study, to invent or project, to enquire into or comment upon Things useless or indifferent, or to advance thus far, and no farther, even upon the worthiest and weightiest Subjects, seems to be no part of the Psalmist's Advice or Intention in this place: Such Speculations are much more the Work of the Brain than the Business of the Heart; and tho' they may engross too great a share of the Affections, as well as they do of Mens Time and Pains, yet they commonly end as they begin, in mere sketch and prospect, and prove barren of any Discoveries or Conclusions, which may help to correct the Passions or better the Man. So that we may believe when the Royal Prophet sends us to our Closets and Couches, he does so upon a much better Errand than the fixing our Thoughts upon, or dividing them between mere Amusements and Trifles; his Design being, without doubt, to call Men off (by the Opportunities of an happy Leisure and Recess) from the Levities of an idle or roving Mind, to the
 serious

SERMON XV. 193

serious Contemplations of Truth and Virtue, of God, Religion and a Life to come. This is the genuine End and Purport of communing with our own Hearts; and as he that uses these blessed Soliloquies can never be said to be alone, because God is with him; so do they tend in their Consequence to make us easy and happy in our own Breasts, render us useful to others, and guard and prepare us against the Snares and Dangers that beset us in the common Tract of Life and Conversation. But then to make room for these serious and inward Reflexions, as well as to procure 'em the better Success; the Psalmist has taken care to recommend them in Company with those Circumstances which will best assist, and be most likely to afford Vigour and Influence to 'em, and they are leisure, privacy, and composedness of Spirit; nor can we doubt but these are very requisite Attendants upon our more devout and solemn Meditations.

As for Leisure, 'tis a Condition, without which, no Thought can be form'd

U3

U3

or ripen'd to any useful purpose; and if the little Business of this Life are ill concerted, and worst manag'd without it, our best and choicest Seasons, those Moments that are freest, and most dis-entagled from the Incumbrances or the Vanities of the World, should certainly be employ'd upon the great Affairs of another. On this Ground it is that Religion has fix'd Returns and Periods assign'd for the publick and solemn Exercise of it, that so Mens Thoughts being call'd off from the things of Sense, may be the fitter to converse with the Father of Spirits. And as Vacations of this kind do so well suit and favour the publick Offices of Religion, they will not prove less friendly to the more private Intercourses of our Hearts with God; so that if Men can allow set Spaces and Intervals of Time for their Sports and Refreshments, their Business or Study, their Designs or Pursuits, the serious Communications already nam'd have so much a better claim to all the Leisure we are Masters of, as they will prove the best Improvement of our best Talent, Time. And

SERMON XV. 295

And if Retirement be join'd with Opportunity, we shall still pray or meditate, commune with God or our own Hearts to much better Advantage: For besides that the Mind is apt to rove and fly off from things abstracted and spiritual, even when it stands best collected within itself; it is too narrow and confin'd to attend to more than one Object at once, so that when we enter upon the great Business of Meditation, there should be a kind of Truce made between the Mind and that painted Theatre of the World: For 'tis hardly possible that our Souls and our Senses should be both fully gratified in their several ways, and at the same time. These are two Masters that neither will nor ought to be serv'd with equal Application; and when the Mind therefore is once engag'd in Reflections upon her self, to break in upon her Privacy, is to disturb the Order and Series of her Thoughts, and draw her out into Hurry and Confusion. For tho' a Mind truly good will employ itself in a Crowd, (as we know that *Asah* pray'd in the midst of a Bat-

296 SERMON XV.

yet the Chamber or Cloſet is much ſitter for thoſe ſolemn and ſecret Tranſactions, which do not require, and perhaps will not endure, any Witneſs but God and our own Hearts.

But neither is it only proper to meditate on our Beds, but to be ſtill and ſilent, calm and compos'd, as long as we are engag'd in this mental Exerciſe. A ſerene and unclouded Spirit is requiſite to every Action that is grave and ſerious; and if the Mind be ruſſled by any Paſſion or Diſorder, it may float or drive, like a Veſſel in a Storm, but will neither bear ſail nor obey the Rudder: And the more of Importance there happens to be in the Subject or Occaſion that beſpeaks our Intention, the worſe we ſhall fare, unleſs we ſtand prepar'd by a due Compoſure; in which regard the Rabbins affirm'd that the Worſhip of God could not dwell with an angry Man. The ſame may be ſaid of a Mind poſſeſs'd by the Act or Habit of any vicious Exceſs; for there is this Analogy at leaſt between the Elements and the Paſſions, that as Sounds are beſt convey'd

SERMON XV. 297

wey'd through a serene Air, so will the Voice of Reason and Conscience be best heard, when the Affections (the lower Region of the Soul) are freest from Storm and Uproar. Having thus far shewn what the Psalmist intends by communing with our Hearts, and how we may best do it to our present and future Advantage, it will be a regular step from this to the

II. Head of Observation, *viz.* The shewing what Tendency such Meditations have (among other Advantages common to 'em) to make us so stand in awe, that we sin not.

Now among the general Benefits arising from this pious Exercise, it will appear to be one, and very well worth the Attainment, that it will improve and strengthen the Powers of the Mind, and keep it open and awake in order to repeat the same Acts, when any good Motion from within, or Occasion from without shall excite or demand 'em. The Habit will grow, like the Joints of the Body, till 'tis knit and confirm'd; and to make the safer and easier Terms
for

298 SERMON XV.

for itself, it will banish by degrees those untoward Habits of Laziness, Indolence, or Corruption, which prevent all serious Meditations, or else render them fruitless and abortive. 'Tis the Fault or Misfortune of many who have the most Room and Leisure, and very often the best Materials for retir'd and serious Meditation, to look down upon it as a sullen and unsociable thing: Their Station or Fortune has plac'd 'em in the way of softer Entertainments; and when they may pass every Hour with fresh and springing Pleasures, why should they submit to the Penance of close and serious Thinking, and rob their Senses to adorn their Souls? But 'tis only Passion and Appetite that argue at this rate; and would Men listen (but never so little) to the cooler and better Reasonings of their own Minds, it would much abate this Keeness of Desire after outward Things; and we should not so often suffer our Affections to run away with us: It would soon appear that the Objects which make such court to our Senses, and so often engage and disappoint

our

our Wishes, are all Vanity and Vexation of Spirit; whereas a wise and good *Man will ever be satisfied from himself.* Thus *David* found his own Heart the best Retreat in all the Trials and Troubles that beset him; and as the best means to preserve it pure is to commune with it, so whoever does so with most Frequency, will still have the less reason to dread or be ashamed of his own Company. For besides that to centre and rest upon our own Thoughts is the surest way to make us easy and steady, it has still,

2. A more direct and special Influence towards that Awe of God, which is the best Guard against Sin. 'Tis the main End of these Searches and Enquiries to get a thorough Acquaintance with the State and Habit of our Minds, to learn our Follies and Defects, our Sins and our Frailties; and when we have brought 'em into the Light, to discard and remove 'em: And indeed where the very Search is impartial, this is more than likely to be the Effect. For when a Man sees his own Vices and Blemishes in that Mirror

300 SERMON XV.

rour of Conscience which will not lye,
 nor flatter; when he has time to sur-
 vey 'em in their Kinds, their Number
 and their several Aggravations; when
 he has trac'd 'em in his Thoughts, from
 their Growth and Encrease to their ve-
 ry Source and Fountain; and not only
 discerns how very bad he is, but how
 much worse he is dispos'd to be, (un-
 less the Grace of God interpose for his
 Rescue;) when, in a word, his Memo-
 ry lays before him, (as it will by the help
 of a serious Recollection) a fresh Scene
 of his past, secret and forgotten Sins,
 as well as those of Presumption and
 Choice; the Soul can never remain un-
 touch'd and indolent upon such a Pro-
 spect, but must either fly to the despe-
 rate Refuge of an entire Thoughtlessness,
 or will be oblig'd to detest and shun
 those Pollutions, which have brought it
 into so wretched a Disorder. And when
 the Mind is once wrought into a Frame
 so well dispos'd for Amendment, it may
 be hop'd that farther and better Thoughts
 will furnish new Recruits of Argument
 to convince the Conscience and com-
 plet

SERMON XV. 301

pleat the Convert. Nor can we long reflect upon the Course of our Lives, the Vanity and Force of our Temptations, our frequent Escapes, and more numerous Defeats, without a renew'd Sense and taste, as it were, of the Goodness and Mercy of God to us, for every time we sinn'd wilfully, and were not cut off in the Act; or thro' Weakness, and were pardon'd; or were strongly tempted, and yet found a way to escape. All this the Mind must consider as the pure Grace of a most kind and merciful Providence; and in the midst of such Thoughts, 'tis hardly possible but it must relent and reform; especially if we join to these Reflections the great Motives of Reward and Punishment, and distinctly view *those Terrors of the Lord which persuade Men*, or those unconceivable *good things which God has prepar'd for them that love him*. These cannot but make a good Part of the Matter of our Meditations: But lest they should prove too general or too confuse, I shall now in the

III. And

302 SERMON XV.

III. And last Place, single out two or three practical Heads of Reflection, which will best employ our Leisure and Privacy; and those I shall name are the Nature and Demerit of Sin, the Omniscience of God and a future Account. I offer Sin as the first Object of Reflection, because 'tis that which God most hates, that which has done Man the greatest Dishonour, and that which will most encrease the Triumph of our great Enemy. 'Twere enough to raise in us an equal Dread and Abhorrence that it has not only disparag'd, but spoil'd our Natures; for it has enfeebled our Reason, deprav'd our Will, disorder'd our Passions, and left the Soul not one sound or entire Faculty. Now tho' this be no very grateful, yet is it a very useful Contemplation, and should have as near and natural an Aspect upon Repentance as Physic upon Health, or the Sight of a Tomb upon the Sentiments of Grief or Pity; for who but must start at the sight of that Monster which has destroy'd a most noble Race of Beings, and is so much more merciless than the Grave,

as

SERMON XV. 303

as this only receives Spoils which the other has made? And if this be a proper Theme to engage in for the better Vindication of God's Honour and our own; if there be very good reason why we should sometimes fix our Thoughts upon that which, for want of Care and Caution, has shipwreck'd our Innocence, disturb'd our Peace, and endanger'd our Happiness: We cannot ever chuse fitter Places for such humbling Reflections, than our Chambers, or the Apartments of our common Repose. Toil and Weariness are part of the first Tax which God thought fit to lay upon Sin; and as Sleep is the Image and Resemblance of Death, so our Beds are so far the Pictures and Emblems of our Graves, as they minister to us that Quiet and Repose which we so much want, but shall never fully possess, till we lie down in the Dust. Had not Man sinn'd, he had neither wanted the Repairs of Food nor Rest, for the Tree of Life would have made him immortal: But being condemn'd to *eat his Bread in the Sweat of his Brows*, he goes forth (says David)

(in

304 SERMON XV.

(in Obedience to this penal Law) *to his Labour until the Evening*; and then says with *Job, My Bed shall comfort me*. And where can he better contemplate the Rise and Progress, the Spoils and the Triumph of Sin? Or can we ever survey it with more Detestation, than in that feeble and languishing Posture to which it has reduc'd him; in that Place of Mourning and Silence, Pain, Sickness and Sorrow; our Chamber I mean; the last and loneliest Stage of our Mortality, and the next and nearest Approach to the Land of Darkness!

But to go off from this Subject of Reflection, the next I would presume to recommend is the divine Omniscience; an Attribute so very magnificent, that the faintest Idea of it were enough to make Men stand in awe, and not dare to sin. For what does it imply but a Being that pervades every thing, whose Presence fills and exceeds all Space, and whose Knowledge penetrates thro' the Heart of Man into the very Depths of Hell? This is that *Eye of God which is in every Place, which beholds Mis-*
chief

SERMON XV. 305

chief to requite it, and is over the Righteous to protect and reward 'em. And would we consider this great Searcher of Hearts as really and intimately present with us, we could not be so hardy, under the Power at least of such Reflections, to offend the Eye of so wise and pure a Being. Seeing therefore that this all-knowing Spirit is really and constantly about our Bed, and about our Path, and spieth out all our ways, may we never be so wicked or unwary to exclude him from our better Meditations, who will be privy to our inmost Retirements; and then we shall reap this blessed Fruit by it, that having made God our Companion, and his Spirit our Guide, we shall be the better prepar'd to meet our Judge, and shall give up our Accounts with Joy, and not with Grief.

And this is the last thing (a future Judgment) which I am now to offer as the Matter and Subject of your retir'd Meditations; and 'tis a Point which flows so necessarily from that infinite Knowledge by which God proves the

306 SERMON XV.

Heart and Reins, that we can hardly consider it apart from that solemn Account. Now if we do really believe this great Article, that *God shall judge the World in Righteousness*; why should not an intense and warm Reflection upon this last Issue of Things, have an Effect as strong at least as the Thoughts we employ upon the Force and Penalty of human Laws? If Shame or Fear, the Regards of Credit, Interest, or Safety will restrain us in the one Case from the Overt Acts or publick Commission of Sin, there is certainly much more than a Parity of Reason, that whilst we think of a future Account, we should fear to offend God in our Closets, or those more conceal'd Retirements, our Hearts. The very same Apostle who affirms *all things to be open to the Eyes of him with whom we have to do*, declares likewise, that *God will bring every secret Thought to Judgment*; so that the surest way to avert or soften the Sentence, will be to judge and prove ourselves beforehand; and then, *if our Hearts condemn us not, we shall have*
Confidence

SERMON XV. 307

Confidence towards God; such a Confidence as shall sweeten our Lives, bring us Peace at our latter end, and pass in time from a Fulness of Hope to that Fulness of Joy, &c.



X₂

SERMON



S E R M O N XVI.

The Worship of wicked Men an
Abomination to God.



PROV. xxi. 27.

The Sacrifice of the Wicked is Abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked Mind?



HE Practice of Religion is not only the noblest Employment, but the purest Comfort of Life; and it were therefore an equal Indiscretion (not to say worse) to spoil the one by Hypocrisy,

SERMON XVI. 309

crisy, or corrupt the other by Profaneness and Indevotion. 'Twas Man's first Honour and Dignity, that God created him after his own Image; and the next to that is, that he is form'd with Powers and Capacities of renewing this divine Stamp by Acts of Holiness. Now as these will in due time advance us to a yet nearer and more glorious Resemblance, so among these will the Worship and Service of God have the first and greatest Influence to render us (according to our stinted and finite Measure) *pure and holy as God is*. The Service we are allow'd to pay our Maker of Prayer and Adoration, Praise and Thanksgiving, has, thro' the divine Grace and Goodness, a great deal more in it, than bare Homage and Duty; it implies Communion and Endearment: And tho' we are oblig'd to *serve the Lord with Fear, and to rejoice unto him with Reverence, i. e.* to use this sacred Privilege with the Modesty and Distance of Creatures; yet is it a most favourable Distinction to be thus admitted to the Throne of Grace, and an Honour in

310 SERMON XVI.

which Man has no Rival, except the Angels themselves. Now as these holy and happy Spirits serve God with the greatest Zeal and Purity, their Worship is not only a Model for ours, (so far as the Powers and Faculties of each Nature agree) but it will prove a most foul Reproach to Beings endow'd with Reason and a Soul, if they do not like these great Patterns, worship God in Spirit and Truth; or if they presume to offer him (instead of the Sacrifice of a pure Heart) the Abomination of unclean Lips, or a polluted Life. This is a Guilt certainly of the very blackest Complexion; and the Wise Man points to it with a more special Emphasis in these Words, *The Sacrifice of the Wicked is Abomination, &c.* These Words supply Matter for the following Heads of Observation.

I. What is meant by the Sacrifice here mentioned, and when we may esteem it faulty and polluted.

II. Upon what Accounts the entire Worship and Religion of wicked Men is highly odious and detestable in the
Eye

S E R M O N XVI. 311

Eye of God. These dispatch'd, I shall

III. Form a practical Conclusion or two upon the whole.

I. I begin then with that Action, or Office rather, here mention'd: And it appears to be of so publick and solemn a Nature, as to be shar'd in common between the best and the worst Men; though the same Service will pass for an Honour, or an Affront, in regard to the End and Principle of those that pay it, and the Form and Manner in which 'tis paid. We may then conclude the Sacrifice here spoken of denotes the Offices of Religion, the whole Substance of that divine Worship which the Apostle styles *our reasonable Service*. Nor does the Wise Man so much regard the private Sentiments of our Minds about the Being and Attributes of God, or the secret and inward Bent of our Wills towards him (tho' we shall appear Friends or Enemies to this great Searcher of Hearts, as we entertain more or less awful and magnificent Thoughts of him;) as he would express, by the word here chosen, the Nature and Substance, the

312 SERMON XVI.

Value and Character of our publick, stated, and religious Services. He refers here, as well as in many other Places, to that great Branch of the *Jewish* Worship, their Victims and Oblations; and these were so numerous as well as significant, that they pass'd by an easy and common Figure for the whole of that ritual Service, and have been made to represent, by a very apposite Allusion, the Parts and Branches of our Christian Worship, 'Tis the frequent Language of *David* to express the sum of Religion by the duty of Sacrifice. Thus he declares *the Sacrifice of the Lord to be a broken Spirit*; and the duty of Praise is not only styled by one Prophet, *the Calves of the Lips*, but another seems to place here the whole stress and weight of Religion; for, says he, upon a very great and signal escape from Danger, *I will offer to thee, the Sacrifice of Thanksgiving*: Nor have the Writers of the New Testament disdain'd to adopt a Word so expressive of an entire and solemn Devotion; for we are commanded *to offer our Bodies a living*, as well as blameless

SERMON XVI. 313

blameless *Sacrifice*; and as Christians enjoy the Title and Dignity of a *Royal Priesthood*, so are they said *to offer up* (in their Prayers and Praises without all doubt) *spiritual Sacrifices by Jesus Christ*. Thus have we seen the Term *Sacrifice* apply'd to a very wide and general meaning, and the fitness of it to describe the main of Religion, may appear by casting our Eye back to its first Design and Original. In this view we shall find it coeval almost with the World itself, and the first Murder that happen'd in it was occasion'd by the preference of one Sacrifice to another: Now as this shews it to be an early part of Religion, so to offer back to God a part of Mens encrease was a lively and natural Token of Respect, Homage and Gratitude. And as the World became more sensible that they were Debtors to the Justice, as well as Goodness of God, and stood in as much need of Mercy and Pardon, as they did of Health, or Air, or their daily Bread; the number of Sacrifices was enlarg'd, and their Nature explain'd by God's Appointment; and there

314 SERMON XVI.

there were two chiefly, those of Atonement and Thanksgiving, which as they made the bulk of the *Jewish* Religion, so did they shadow the two main Duties of the *Christian*, Charity and Repentance: But still as these were but dumb and naked Types in themselves, and borrow'd their sole Virtue from their End and Application, so did they lose even that, and become mere useless Signs when the Heart and the Obligation did not go together, or Men performed the outward Action, without the inward Purity of the Mind and Conscience.

This is what I am still to account for from the latter Part of this Text; for as *Solomon* describes Religion in general by the word Sacrifice, so to render it well or ill accepted, he assures us, that a principal Regard will be had to the Temper and Spirit of the Offerer himself. For the Sacrifice of the wicked is an Abomination, much more so if he offer it with a wicked Mind: So that this sacred Writer seems to lay before us not only that general Quality (of Wickedness)

SERMON XVI. 315

Wickedness) which will render our Persons and Services odious to God, but those degrees and advances of it which will provoke him to a more just and bitter Abhorrence. The Grounds here assign'd of the divine Detestation are, when Men habitually wicked appear before God to pay their Vows and Oblations, and when they do so with an express and formal Intention, as it were, to abuse and profane his Worship: And it is but too evident that Men do now, as well as during the Temple-service, pollute both ways the Altar and Worship of God. As to the Subjects of it, those who are admitted into Covenant with God, and under that Relation allow'd to approach his holy Temple, do not Men of the most corrupt Lives join outwardly at least in this sacred Communion, and render the House of God a Shelter or Asylum for their Vices, rather than consider it as *the House of Prayer*, and *the place where God's Honour dwells*? Not that every Error and Trespas a Man commits will make our Worship impure, or such as may be justly

316 SERMON XVI.

justly term'd the Sacrifice of the wicked; but when Men presume to pay these solemn Devotions under a Mass of Guilt unrepented of, the Service will receive a Taint from the Lips that pay it; for tho' Praise be comely for the Upright, 'tis not so in the Mouth of a Sinner: And therefore the Prophet declares in God's Name to such Votaries as these, that he that *killed an Ox, would be as one that slew a Man, and he that sacrificed a Lamb, as he that cut off a Dog's Neck.* But neither is our Worship polluted only by an ill Course of Life; but 'tis too often offer'd with a wicked Mind, or as some Versions render it (in Wickedness). 'Tis certainly thus when Men pay the Duties of Religion with Spirits unhallow'd and unprepar'd, or with any other Views than those of Improvement and Edification, and 'tis more so when the matter of their Prayers or Praises is corrupt; when the Oppressor hopes to atone by the Sacrifice of Prayer or Alms, for Rapine and Violence; or any other vicious Man, to compound by a form of Godliness

SERMON XVI. 317

Godliness for the Sins he likes best: I might add, that our most formal Devotions are then wicked, when they are not offer'd in Charity; and we are assur'd that God rejected *Balaam's Sacrifice*, because 'twas pregnant with a Curse against his own People. However, if our Services are faulty in these or more Instances, we shall justly incur by 'em the hatred of that God, who loves Righteousness and hates Iniquity: And this is the Enquiry I am now to make under my

II. Head, *viz.* Upon what Grounds the entire Worship and Service of wicked Men is odious and abominable in the Eye of God; and this will be best accounted for from a distinct view of the Persons that pay it, the Principle it springs from, and the manner 'tis perform'd in.

As for the Persons concern'd in these religious Offerings, 'tis a Brand justly and frequently set upon 'em, that they are Haters of God, and express and formal Enemies of Truth and Goodness: For their Course and Habit of
Life

318 SERMON XVI.

Life (which is the most substantial part of any Man's Religion) is an open Contradiction to the Power of Holiness, the Life of God, and the Laws of the Gospel. And well then may a God of infinite Purity, despise the Prayers, and reject the Sacrifice of those whose Hearts, Hands, and Lips are so habitually polluted. The divine Love and Hatred can have no Objects but Virtue or Vice, and if want of Charity alone, unqualifies a Man to bring *his Gift to the Altar*, much more will the absence of all Christian Virtues, and the filth and corruption of numberless Sins and Vices, turn that Gift into a Curse: And to shew that God resents this Treatment as the foulest Indignity, he demands by the Prophet *David*, with what face or confidence the Companions of Thieves and Adulterers could *take his Covenant within their Mouths*. 'Tis certain that the Grandees of this World would forbid the most distant Approaches of such as dishonour'd 'em; and can we conceive the King of Kings is less jealous of his Glory, or will admit Communion with
his

SERMON XVI. 319

his avow'd Enemies? They may indeed present themselves in his Sanctuary, and join in the same Prayers and Praises with better Men; but whilst the Sacrifice wants an Heart, the Place will not consecrate the Duty, but the Action will certainly pollute the Place. The fallen Angels were once the Worshipers of God, and offer'd him Praise and Adoration as Sons and Subjects; and the reason why they do not still do so, is because they are confirm'd in Malice and Enmity; and tho' God is pleas'd to leave these Rebels Faith enough to make 'em tremble, yet will he accept no formal Worship from them; and why then (to speak in a way of Proportion,) should Men resolve to indulge their Sins, or ever flatter 'emselfes that they shall please God by any outward Homage, when their Lives and Actions give the Lye to their Worship, and they are plunging into a State of Desertion and Impenitence?

But to go on: The Principles and Motives which bad Men act upon, afford another good reason why their
most

320 SERMON XVI.

most solemn Professions should want Acceptance: For as the Love and Fear of God are the only true Springs of Duty, so where they are banish'd, our most splendid Devotions are but a Set of Words, and the mere labour of the Lips. But, as it cannot possibly be a true Zeal for God or Sense of Piety which engages bad Men, (I speak of those still who allow themselves an Indulgence in great and known Sins) in the publick Offices of Religion; so is it evident, that they too often practise these, not as Duties, but mere Rites and Forms, and have not so much at Heart the Honour of God, as the Regards of decency and custom: And would even the sense of Shame, or fear of Disgrace render 'em serious in the Worship of God, more careful of their Lives, and better dispos'd upon their next approach, it were an happy Effect indeed: But Experience shews that these are Principles too weak to kindle in Mens Breasts a warm and vigorous Sense of God and Goodness. The great End of approaching God's Altar, is to recognize

SERMON XVI. 311

nize his Mercies, confess our Sins, and declare our Repentance, to implore the Blessings of this Life and a better, of Grace and Pardon, Life and Protection, and by all these Acts to honour God and edify his Church; and 'tis our Happiness to be assisted by a most excellent Liturgy in every Part and Branch of this Service: But when Men pay their Attendance upon other Views, than those of real Devotion, and are not able to say in the Language of the Psalmist, *I was glad when they said unto, we will go into the House of the Lord:* It cannot be otherwise, but God should reject such Men, and such Services; for unless he will suffer both his Name and House to be profan'd, every wilful Sinner ought to regard this Question as an express Sentence of Banishment, *Who hath required this at your Hands to tread my Courts?*

But there is a yet farther Ground of God's hatred and displeasure to wicked Men from the very Act of their Worship; for they either perform this Duty in the most remiss and careless manner,

311 SERMON XVI.

manner, with Minds divided between God and the World; or if it cannot be said of 'em that they are present in Body, but absent in Spirit, their Prayers want Faith or Fervour, and they lift up *unholy Hands with Wrath or Doubting*. But now when Men either serve God with Indifference, implore Success to bad Actions or Designs, or think with the Pharisees, they shall be heard for their much speaking, much more when they confess their Sins, and yet resolve to keep 'em, or hope to compound by the easier Duties of Religion for the less pleasant and more difficult: They may rest assur'd, that God will not accept such vain Oblations, but will esteem their Worship as a kind of Mockery, and their Incence as an Abomination. Now then to apply briefly what has been said; the first and most direct use to be made of it, is this, that since God has profess'd so great an Abhorrence of the mere outward and formal Devotions of wicked Men, we should sincerely endeavour *to purge our Conscience from dead Works, that we may*
serve

S E R M O N XVI. 323

serve the living and true God, with a pure, holy and religious Worship. Did Men regard this as the most serious and important Action of their whole Lives, that the Duty itself is a near and real Intercourse with the Father of Spirits, the Place is paid in, the Habitation of his Holiness, and themselves (unless they mar their Title) one Part of the Communion of Saints; they would certainly guard their Approaches to this Duty with a most holy Jealousy, and so keep their Foot, when they enter into the House of God, that they may not pay the Sacrifice of Fools. If the Prayers of the Wicked are turn'd into Sin, let 'em therefore cease to do evil and learn to do well; and then may they come with Boldness to the Throne of Grace; For, after all, the worst Habit of Life is so far from excusing Men's Absence from God's House, that it brings 'em under a double Guilt, as it involves 'em under this uncomfortable Dilemma, either to neglect or profane the Offices of Religion. But, God be thanked, no Man is wicked by Fate, but Choice; and as he may,

Y 2

through

324 SERMON XVI.

through the Grace of God, amend his Life, so let him resolve and endeavour this in his own Breast; and then what will sooner convert him than that Word of God which is quick and powerful? Or what better confirm and refresh him than to *serve God in the very Beauty of Holiness?*

For, to conclude this Subject, as the Sacrifice of the Wicked is an Abomination to God, so is *the Prayer of the Righteous his Delight*. 'Tis a Consequence of God's Love and Favour to good Men, that he accepts what they do, or intend for his Glory, with the most kind and gracious Approbation: And tho' their Services are mix'd with much Frailty and many Blemishes, yet will he not deprive 'em of the Comfort and Dignity of this glorious Communion. But still, and for ever shall *the effectual Prayer of one righteous Person avail much*; and God will supply by his own Spirit, what is wanting in ours, to render us such Servants and Worshippers as he delights in. Let us *not forget then the assembling our selves together*

SERMON XVI. 325

together for this blessed purpose; and when we do so, may it always be for the better and not for the worse; and so shall that God, who has promis'd, when but two or three are gathered together in his Name, to be in the midst of them, receive our Prayers, relieve our Wants, protect our Persons, and save our Souls in the Day of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

F I N I S.



SERMON XVI. 325

together for this blessed purpose; and when we do so, may it always be for the better and not for the worse; and so shall that God, who has promis'd, when but two or three are gathered together in his Name, to be in the midst of them, receive our Prayers, believe our Writings, protect our Persons, and save our Souls in the Day of the Last Judgment. Amen.

10 FEB 60

F I N I S



